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ROBERT BROWNING'S POEMS.



*Sordello, Strafford,
Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day.*

ROBERT BROWNING'S COMPLETE WORKS

PUBLISHED BY

TICKNOR AND FIELDS.

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Sordello, Strafford,
Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day

BY

ROBERT BROWNING



BOSTON
TICKNOR AND FIELDS
1864

UNIVERSITY PRESS:
WELCH, BIGELOW, AND COMPANY,
CAMBRIDGE.

*Dedication to the New English Edition of Browning's
Complete Works.*

I DEDICATE THESE VOLUMES

TO

MY OLD FRIEND JOHN FORSTER,

GLAD AND GRATEFUL THAT HE WHO,
FROM THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THE VARIOUS POEMS THEY INCLUDE,
HAS BEEN THEIR PROMPTTEST AND STAUCHEST HELPER,
SHOULD SEEM EVEN NEARER TO ME NOW
THAN THIRTY YEARS AGO.

R. B.

London, April 21, 1863.

To Messrs. TICKNOR AND FIELDS : —

I take advantage of the opportunity of the publication in the United States of my Poems, for printing which you have liberally remunerated me, to express my earnest desire that the power of publishing in America this and every subsequent work of mine may rest exclusively with your house.

I am, my dear Sirs, with high esteem,

Yours faithfully,

ROBERT BROWNING.

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S O R D E L L O .

1840.

TO J. MILSAND, OF DIJON.

DEAR FRIEND:—

Let this poem be introduced by your name, and so repay all trouble it ever cost me. I wrote it twenty-five years ago for only a few, counting even in these on somewhat more care about its subject than they really had. My own faults of expression were many; but with care for a man or book such would be surmounted, and without it what avails the faultlessness of either? I blame nobody, least of all myself, who did my best then and since; for I lately gave time and pains to turn my work into what the many might—instead of what the few must—like: but after all, I imagined another thing at first, and therefore leave as I find it. The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so,—you, with many known and unknown to me, think so,—others may one day think so: and whether my attempt remain for them or not, I trust, though away and past it, to continue ever yours,

R. B.

LONDON, June 9, 1863.

SORDELLO.



BOOK THE FIRST.

A QUIXOTIC ATTEMPT.

WHO will, may hear Sordello's story told :
His story? Who believes me shall behold
The man, pursue his fortunes to the end,
Like me : for as the friendless-people's friend
Spied from his hill-top once, despite the din
And dust of multitudes, Pentapolin
Named o' the Naked Arm, I single out
Sordello, compassed murkily about
With ravage of six long sad hundred years.
Only believe me. Ye believe?

Appears
Verona . . . Never, I should warn you first,
Of my own choice had this, if not the worst
Yet not the best expedient, served to tell
A story I could body forth so well
By making speak, myself kept out of view,
The very man as he was wont to do,

And leaving you to say the rest for him.
Since, though I might be proud to see the dim
Abysmal Past divide its hateful surge,
Letting of all men this one man emerge
Because it pleased me, yet, that moment past,
I should delight in watching first to last
His progress as you watch it, not a whit
More in the secret than yourselves who sit
Fresh-chapleted to listen. But it seems
Your setters-forth of unexampled themes,
Makers of quite new men, producing them,
Would best chalk broadly on each vesture's hem,
The wearer's quality ; or take their stand,
Motley on back and pointing-pole in hand,
Beside him. So, for once I face ye, friends,
Summoned together from the world's four ends,
Dropped down from heaven or cast up from hell,
To hear the story I propose to tell.
Confess now, poets know the dragnet's trick,
Catching the dead, if fate denies the quick,
And shaming her ; 't is not for fate to choose
Silence or song because she can refuse
Real eyes to glisten more, real hearts to ache
Less oft, real brows turn smoother for our sake :
I have experienced something of her spite ;
But there 's a realm wherein she has no right
And I have many lovers. Say, but few
Friends fate accords me ? Here they are : now view
The host I muster ! Many a lighted face

Foul with no vestige of the grave's disgrace ;
 What else should tempt them back to taste our air
 Except to see how their successors fare ?
 My audience ! and they sit, each ghostly man
 Striving to look as living as he can,
 Brother by breathing brother ; thou art set,
 Clear-witted critic, by . . . but I'll not fret
 A wondrous soul of them, nor move death's spleen
 Who loves not to unlock them. Friends ! I mean
 The living in good earnest — ye elect
 Chiefly for love — suppose not I reject
 Judicious praise, who contrary shall peep,
 Some fit occasion, forth, for fear ye sleep,
 To glean your bland approvals. Then, appear,
 Verona ! stay — thou, spirit, come not near
 Now — not this time desert thy cloudy place
 To scare me, thus employed, with that pure face !
 I need not fear this audience, I make free
 With them, but then this is no place for thee !
 The thunder-phrase of the Athenian, grown
 Up out of memories of Marathon,
 Would echo like his own sword's griding screech
 Braying a Persian shield, — the silver speech
 Of Sidney's self, the starry paladin,
 Turn intense as a trumpet sounding in
 The knights to tilt, — wert thou to hear ! What heart
 Have I to play my puppets, bear my part
 Before these worthies ?

Lo, the Past is hurled

In twain : up-thrust, out-staggering on the world,
 Subsiding into shape, a darkness rears
 Its outline, kindles at the core, appears
 Verona. 'Tis six hundred years and more
 Since an event. The Second Friedrich wore
 The purple, and the Third Honorius filled
 The holy chair. That autumn eve was stilled :
 A last remains of sunset dimly burned
 O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
 By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
 In one long flare of crimson ; as a brand,
 The woods beneath lay black. A single eye
 From all Verona cared for the soft sky.
 But, gathering in its ancient market-place,
 Talked group with restless group ; and not a face
 But wrath made livid, for among them were
 Death's stanch purveyors, such as have in care
 To feast him. Fear had long since taken root
 In every breast, and now these crushed its fruit,
 The ripe hate, like a wine : to note the way
 It worked while each grew drunk ! men grave and gray
 Stood, with shut eyelids, rocking to and fro,
 Letting the silent luxury trickle slow
 About the hollows where a heart should be ;
 But the young gulped with a delirious glee
 Some foretaste of their first debauch in blood
 At the fierce news : for, be it understood,
 Envoys apprised Verona that her prince
 Count Richard of Saint Boniface, joined since

A year with Azzo, Este's Lord, to thrust
Taurello Salinguerra, prime in trust
With Ecelin Romano, from his seat
Ferrara, — over zealous in the feat
And stumbling on a peril unaware,
Was captive, trammelled in his proper snare,
They phrase it, taken by his own intrigue.
Immediate succor from the Lombard League
Of fifteen cities that affect the Pope,
For Azzo, therefore, and his fellow-hope
Of the Guelf cause, a glory overcast!
Men's faces, late agape, are now aghast.
“ Prone is the purple pavis ; Este makes
Mirth for the devil when he undertakes
To play the Ecelin ; as if it cost
Merely your pushing-by to gain a post
Like his ! The patron tells ye, once for all,
There be sound reasons that preferment fall
On our beloved ” . . .

“ Duke o' the Rood, why not ? ”
Shouted an Estian, “ grudge ye such a lot ?
The hill-cat boasts some cunning of her own,
Some stealthy trick to better beasts unknown,
That quick with prey enough her hunger blunts,
And feeds her fat while gaunt the lion hunts.”

“ Taurello,” quoth an envoy, “ as in wane
Dwelt at Ferrara. Like an osprey fain
To fly but forced the earth his couch to make
Far inland, till his friend the tempest wake,

Waits he the Kaiser's coming; and as yet
 That fast friend sleeps, and he too sleeps: but let
 Only the billow freshen, and he snuffs
 The aroused hurricane ere it enroughs
 The sea it means to cross because of him.
 Sinketh the breeze? His hope-sick eye grows dim;
 Creep closer on the creature! Every day
 Strengthens the Pontiff; Ecelin, they say,
 Dozes now at Oliero, with dry lips
 Telling upon his perished finger-tips
 How many ancestors are to depose
 Ere he be Satan's Viceroy when the doze
 Deposits him in hell. So, Guelfs rebuilt
 Their houses; not a drop of blood was spilt
 When Cino Bocchimpane chanced to meet
 Buccio Virtù — God's wafer, and the street
 Is narrow! Tutti Santi, think, a-swarm
 With Ghibellins, and yet he took no harm!
 This could not last. Off Salinguerra went
 To Padua, Podestà, 'with pure intent,'
 Said he, 'my presence, judged the single bar
 To permanent tranquillity, may jar
 No longer' — so! his back is fairly turned?
 The pair of goodly palaces are burned,
 The gardens ravaged, and our Guelfs laugh, drunk
 A week with joy. The next, their laughter sunk
 In sobs of blood, for they found, some strange way,
 Old Salinguerra back again — I say,
 Old Salinguerra in the town once more

Uprooting, overturning, flame before,
 Blood fetlock-high beneath him. Azzo fled ;
 Who scaped the carnage followed ; then the dead
 Were pushed aside from Salinguerra's throne,
 He ruled once more Ferrara, all alone.
 Till Azzo, stunned awhile, revived, would pounce
 Coupled with Boniface, like lynx and ounce,
 On the gorged bird. The burghers ground their teeth
 To see troop after troop encamp beneath
 I' the standing corn thick o'er the scanty patch
 It took so many patient months to snatch
 Out of the marsh ; while just within their walls
 Men fed on men. At length Taurello calls
 A parley : ' let the Count wind up the war !'
 Richard, light-hearted as a plunging-star,
 Agrees to enter for the kindest ends
 Ferrara, flanked with fifty chosen friends,
 No horse-boy more, for fear your timid sort
 Should fly Ferrara at the bare report.
 Quietly through the town they rode, jog-jog ;
 ' Ten, twenty, thirty, — curse the catalogue
 Of burnt Guelf houses ! Strange, Taurello shows
 Not the least sign of life ' — whereat arose
 A general growl : ' How ? With his victors by ?
 I and my Veronese ? My troops and I ?
 Receive us, was your word ?' So jogged they on,
 Nor laughed their host too openly : once gone
 Into the trap ! —

Six hundred years ago !

Such the time's aspect and peculiar woe
 (Yourselves may spell it yet in chronicles,
 Albeit the worm, our busy brother, drills
 His sprawling path through letters anciently
 Made fine and large to suit some abbot's eye)
 When the new Hohenstauffen dropped the mask,
 Flung John of Brienne's favor from his casque,
 Forswore crusading, had no mind to leave
 Saint Peter's proxy leisure to retrieve
 Losses to Otho and to Barbaross,
 Or make the Alps less easy to recross ;
 And, thus confirming Pope Honorius' fear,
 Was excommunicate that very year.
 "The triple-bearded Teuton come to life !"
 Groaned the Great League ; and, arming for the strife,
 Wide Lombardy, on tiptoe to begin,
 Took up, as it was Guelf or Ghibellin,
 Its cry ; what cry ?

"The Emperor to come !"

His crowd of feudatories, all and some,
 That leapt down with a crash of swords, spears, shields,
 One fighter on his fellow, to our fields,
 Scattered anon, took station here and there,
 And carried it, till now, with little care —
 Cannot but cry for him ; how else rebut
 Us longer ? Cliffs, an earthquake suffered jut
 In the mid-sea, each domineering crest,
 Nothing save such another throe can wrest
 From out (conceive) a certain chokeweed grown

Since o'er the waters, twine and tangle thrown
 Too thick, too fast accumulating round,
 Too sure to over-riot and confound
 Ere long each brilliant islet with itself
 Unless a second shock save shoal and shelf,
 Whirling the sea-drift wide : alas, the bruised
 And sullen wreck ! Sunlight to be diffused
 For that ! Sunlight, 'neath which, a scum at first,
 The million fibres of our chokeweed nurst
 Dispread themselves, mantling the troubled main,
 And, shattered by those rocks, took hold again,
 So kindly blazed it — that same blaze to brood
 O'er every cluster of the multitude
 Still hazarding new clasps, ties, filaments,
 An emulous exchange of pulses, vents
 Of nature into nature ; till some growth
 Unfancied yet, exuberantly clothe
 A surface solid now, continuous, one :
 "The Pope, for us the People, who begun
 The People, carries on the People thus,
 To keep that Kaiser off and dwell with us !"

See you ?
 Or say, Two Principles that live
 Each fitly by its Representative.
 "Hill-cat" — who called him so ? — the gracefulest
 Adventurer, the ambiguous stranger-guest
 Of Lombardy (sleek but that ruffling fur,
 Those talons to their sheath !) whose velvet purr
 Soothes jealous neighbors when a Saxon scout

12 HOW ECELO'S HOUSE GREW HEAD OF THOSE,

— Arpo or Yoland, is it? — one without
A country or a name, presumes to couch
Beside their noblest; until men avouch
That, of all Houses in the Trevisan,
Conrad descries no fitter, rear or van,
Than Ecelo! They laughed as they enrolled
That name at Milan on the page of gold,
Godego's lord, — Ramon, Marostica,
Cartiglion, Bassano, Loria,
And every sheep-cote on the Suabian's fief!
No laughter when his son, "the Lombard Chief"
Forsooth, as Barbarossa's path was bent
To Italy along the Vale of Trent,
Welcomed him at Roncaglia! Sadness now —
The hamlets nested on the Tyrol's brow,
The Asolan and Euganean hills,
The Rhetian and the Julian, sadness fills
Them all, for Ecelin vouchsafes to stay
Among and care about them; day by day
Choosing this pinnacle, the other spot,
A castle building to defend a cot,
A cot built for a castle to defend,
Nothing but castles, castles, nor an end
To boasts how mountain ridge may join with ridge
By sunken gallery and soaring bridge.
He takes, in brief, a figure that beseems
The griesliest nightmare of the Church's dreams,
— A Signory firm-rooted, unestranged
From its old interests, and nowise changed

By its new neighborhood ; perchance the vaunt
Of Otho, "my own Este shall supplant
Your Este," come to pass. The sire led in
A son as cruel ; and this Ecelin
Had sons, in turn, and daughters sly and tall,
And curling and compliant ; but for all
Romano (so they styled him) throve, that neck
Of his so pinched and white, that hungry cheek
Proved 't was some fiend, not him, the man's-flesh went
To feed : whereas Romano's instrument,
Famous Taurello Salinguerra, sole
I' the world, a tree whose boughs were slipt the bole
Successively, why should not he shed blood
To further a design ? Men understood
Living was pleasant to him as he wore
His careless surcoat, glanced some missive o'er,
Propped on his truncheon in the public way,
While his lord lifted writhen hands to pray,
Lost at Oliero's convent.

Hill-cats, face

With Azzo, our Guelf Lion ! — nor disgrace
A worthiness conspicuous near and far
(Atii at Rome while free and consular,
Este at Padua who repulsed the Hun)
By trumpeting the Church's princely son
Styled Patron of Rovigo's Polesine,
Ancona's March, Ferrara's . . . ask, in fine,
Our chronicles, commenced when some old monk
Found it intolerable to be sunk

(Vexed to the quick by his revolting cell)
 Quite out of summer while alive and well :
 Ended when by his mat the Prior stood,
 'Mid busy promptings of the brotherhood,
 Striving to coax from his decrepit brains
 The reason Father Porphyry took pains
 To blot those ten lines out which used to stand
 First on their charter drawn by Hildebrand.

The same night wears. Verona's rule of yore
 Was vested in a certain Twenty-four ;
 And while within his palace these debate
 Concerning Richard and Ferrara's fate,
 Glide we by clapping doors, with sudden glare
 Of cressets vented on the dark, nor care
 For aught that's seen or heard until we shut
 The smother in, the lights, all noises but
 The carroch's booming: safe at last! Why strange
 Such a recess should lurk behind a range
 Of banquet-rooms? Your finger — thus — you push
 A spring, and the wall opens, would you rush
 Upon the banqueters, select your prey,
 Waiting, the slaughter-weapons in the way
 Strewing this very bench, with sharpened ear
 A preconcerted signal to appear ;
 Or if you simply crouch with beating heart,
 Bearing in some voluptuous pageant part
 To startle them. Nor mutes nor masquers now ;
 Nor any . . . does that one man sleep whose brow
 The dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er ?

What woman stood beside him? not the more
Is he unfastened from the earnest eyes
Because that arras fell between? Her wise
And lulling words are yet about the room,
Her presence wholly poured upon the gloom
Down even to her vesture's creeping stir.
And so reclines he, saturate with her,
Until an outcry from the square beneath
Pierces the charm: he springs up, glad to breathe
Above the cunning element, and shakes
The stupor off as (look you) morning breaks
On the gay dress, and, near concealed by it,
The lean frame like a half-burnt taper, lit
Erst at some marriage-feast, then laid away
Till the Armenian bridegroom's dying-day,
In his wool wedding-robe. For he — for he,
Gate-vein of this hearts' blood of Lombardy,
(If I should falter now) — for he is Thine!
Sordello, thy forerunner, Florentine!
A herald-star I know thou didst absorb
Relentless into the consummate orb
That scared it from its right to roll along
A sempiternal path with dance and song
Fulfilling its allotted period,
Serenest of the progeny of God!
Who yet resigns it not; His darling stoops
With no quenched lights, desponds with no blank troops
Of disenfranchised brilliances, for, blent
Utterly with thee, its shy element

16 ONE BELONGS TO DANTE ; HIS BIRTHPLACE.

Like thine upburneth prosperous and clear.
Still, what if I approach the august sphere
Named now with only one name, disentwine
That under-current soft and argentine
From its fierce mate in the majestic mass
Leavened as the sea whose fire was mixt with glass
In John's transcendent vision, — launch once more
That lustre ? Dante, pacer of the shore
Where gluttred hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,
Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume —
Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope
Into a darkness quieted by hope ;
Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
In gracious twilights where His chosen lie,
I would do this ! if I should falter now !

In Mantua-territory half is slough
Half pine-tree forest ; maples, scarlet-oaks
Breed o'er the river-beds ; even Mincio chokes
With sand the summer through ; but 't is morass
In winter up to Mantua walls. There was,
Some thirty years before this evening's coil,
One spot reclaimed from the surrounding spoil,
Goito ; just a castle built amid
A few low mountains ; firs and larches hid
Their main defiles, and rings of vineyard bound
The rest. Some captured creature in a pound,
Whose artless wonder quite precludes distress,
Secure beside in its own loveliness,
So peered with airy head, below, above,

The castle at its toils, the lapwings love
 To glean among at grape-time. Pass within.
 A maze of corridors contrived for sin,
 Dusk winding-stairs, dim galleries got past,
 You gain the inmost chambers, gain at last
 A maple-panelled room: that haze which seems
 Floating about the panel, if there gleams
 A sunbeam over it, will turn to gold
 And in light-graven characters unfold
 The Arab's wisdom everywhere; what shade
 Marred them a moment, those slim pillars made,
 Cut like a company of palms to prop
 The roof, each kissing top entwined with top,
 Leaning together; in the carver's mind
 Some knot of bacchanals, flushed cheek combined
 With straining forehead, shoulders purpled, hair
 Diffused between, who in a goat-skin bear
 A vintage; graceful sister-palms! But quick
 To the main wonder, now. A vault, see; thick
 Black shade about the ceiling, though fine slits
 Across the buttress suffer light by fits
 Upon a marvel in the midst. Nay, stoop —
 A dullish gray-streaked cumbrous font, a group
 Round it, each side of it, where'er one sees,
 Upholds it — shrinking Caryatides
 Of just-tinged marble like Eve's liliated flesh
 Beneath her Maker's finger when the fresh
 First pulse of life shot brightening the snow.
 The font's edge burdens every shoulder, so

B

They muse upon the ground, eyelids half closed ;
 Some, with meek arms behind their backs disposed,
 Some, crossed above their bosoms, some, to veil
 Their eyes, some, propping chin and cheek so pale,
 Some, hanging slack an utter helpless length
 Dead as a buried vestal whose whole strength
 Goes when the grate above shuts heavily.
 So dwell these noiseless girls, patient to see,
 Like priestesses because of sin impure
 Penanced for ever, who resigned endure,
 Having that once drunk sweetness to the aregs.
 And every eve, Sordello's visit begs
 Pardon for them : constant as eve he came
 To sit beside each in her turn, the same
 As one of them, a certain space : and awe
 Made a great indistinctness till he saw
 Sunset slant cheerful through the buttress-chinks,
 Gold seven times globed ; surely our maiden shrinks
 And a smile stirs her as if one faint grain
 Her load were lightened, one shade less the stain
 Obscured her forehead, yet one more bead slipt
 From off the rosary whereby the crypt
 Keeps count of the contritions of its charge ?
 Then with a step more light, a heart more large,
 He may depart, leave her and every one
 To linger out the penance in mute stone.
 Ah, but Sordello ? 'T is the tale I mean
 To tell you. In this castle may be seen,
 On the hill-tops, or underneath the vines,

Or eastward by the mound of firs and pines
 That shuts out Mantua, still in loneliness,
 A slender boy in a loose page's dress,
 Sordello : do but look on him awhile
 Watching ('t is autumn) with an earnest smile
 The noisy flock of thievish birds at work
 Among the yellowing vineyards ; see him lurk
 ('T is winter with its sullenest of storms)
 Beside that arras-length of brodered forms,
 On tiptoe, lifting in both hands a light
 Which makes yon warrior's visage flutter bright
 — Ecelo, dismal father of the brood,
 And Ecelin, close to the girl he wooed,
 Auria, and their Child, with all his wives
 From Agnes to the Tuscan that survives,
 Lady of the castle, Adelaide. His face
 — Look, now he turns away ! Yourselves shall trace
 (The delicate nostril swerving wide and fine,
 A sharp and restless lip, so well combine
 With that calm brow) a soul fit to receive
 Delight at every sense ; you can believe
 Sordello foremost in the regal class
 Nature has broadly severed from her mass
 Of men, and framed for pleasure, as she frames
 Some happy lands, that have luxurious names,
 For loose fertility ; a footfall there
 Suffices to upturn to the warm air
 Half-germinating spices ; mere decay
 Produces richer life ; and day by day

New pollen on the lily-petal grows,
 And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.
 You recognize at once the finer dress
 Of flesh that amply lets in loveliness
 At eye and ear, while round the rest is furled
 (As though she would not trust them with her world)
 A veil that shows a sky not near so blue,
 And lets but half the sun look fervid through.
 How can such love? — like souls on each full-fraught
 Discovery brooding, blind at first to aught
 Beyond its beauty, till exceeding love
 Becomes an aching weight; and, to remove
 A curse that haunts such natures — to preclude
 Their finding out themselves can work no good
 To what they love nor make it very blest
 By their endeavor, — they are fain invest
 The lifeless thing with life from their own soul,
 Availing it to purpose, to control,
 To dwell distinct and have peculiar joy
 And separate interests that may employ
 That beauty fitly, for its proper sake.
 Nor rest they here; fresh births of beauty wake
 Fresh homage, every grade of love is past,
 With every mode of loveliness: then cast
 Inferior idols off their borrowed crown
 Before a coming glory. Up and down
 Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine
 To throb the secret forth; a touch divine —
 And the scaled eyeball owns the mystic rod:

Visibly through His garden walketh God.
 So fare they. Now revert. One character
 Denotes them through the progress and the stir, —
 A need to blend with each external charm,
 Bury themselves, the whole heart wide and warm,
 In something not themselves; they would belong
 To what they worship — stronger and more strong
 Thus prodigally fed — which gathers shape
 And feature, soon imprisons past escape
 The votary framed to love and to submit
 Nor ask, as passionately he kneels to it,
 Whence grew the idol's empery. So runs
 A legend: light had birth ere moons and suns,
 Flowing through space a river and alone,
 Till chaos burst and blank the spheres were strown
 Hither and thither, foundering and blind,
 When into each of them rushed light — to find
 Itself no place, foiled of its radiant chance.
 Let such forego their just inheritance!
 For there's a class that eagerly looks, too,
 On beauty, but, unlike the gentler crew,
 Proclaims each new revelation born a twin
 With a distinctest consciousness within
 Referring still the quality, now first
 Revealed, to their own soul — its instinct nursed
 In silence, now remembered better, shown
 More thoroughly, but not the less their own;
 A dream come true; the special exercise
 Of any special function that implies

22 HOW POETS CLASS AT LENGTH—FOR HONOR,

The being fair, or good, or wise, or strong,
Dormant within their nature all along —
Whose fault? So, homage, other souls direct
Without, turns inward; “How should this deject
Thee, soul?” they murmur; “wherefore strength
 quelled

Because, its trivial accidents withheld,
Organs are missed that clog the world, inert,
Wanting a will, to quicken and exert,
Like thine—existence cannot satiate,
Cannot surprise? laugh thou at envious fate,
Who, from earth’s simplest combination stamp
With individuality—uncrampt
By living its faint elemental life,
Dost soar to heaven’s completest essence, rife
With grandeurs, unaffronted to the last,
Equal to being all!”

 In truth? Thou hast
Life, then — wilt challenge life for us: our race
Is vindicated so, obtains its place
In thy ascent, the first of us; whom we
May follow, to the meanest, finally,
With our more bounded wills?

 Ah, but to find
A certain mood enervate such a mind,
Counsel it slumber in the solitude
Thus reached nor, stooping, task for mankind’s good
Its nature just as life and time accord
“— Too narrow an arena to reward

Emprize — the world's occasion worthless since
 Not absolutely fitted to evince
 Its mastery !” Or if yet worse befall,
 And a desire possess it to put all
 That nature forth, forcing our straitened sphere
 Contain it, — to display completely here
 The mastery another life should learn,
 Thrusting in time eternity's concern, —
 So that Sordello . . . Fool, who spied the mark
 Of leprosy upon him, violet-dark
 Already as he loiters? Born just now,
 With the new century, beside the glow
 And efflorescence out of barbarism ;
 Witness a Greek or two from the abysm
 That stray through Florence-town with studious air,
 Calming the chisel of that Pisan pair :
 If Nicolo should carve a Christus yet !
 While at Siena is Guidone set,
 Forehead on hand ; a painful birth must be
 Matured ere Saint Eufemia's sacristy
 Or transept gather fruits of one great gaze
 At the moon : look you ! The same orange haze, —
 The same blue stripe round that — and, i' the midst,
 Thy spectral whiteness, Mother-maid, who didst
 Pursue the dizzy painter !

Woe, then, worth

Any officious babble letting forth
 The leprosy confirmed and ruinous
 To spirit lodged in a contracted house !

Go back to the beginning, rather ; blend
 It gently with Sordello's life ; the end
 Is piteous, you may see, but much between
 Pleasant enough. Meantime, some pyx to screen
 The full-grown pest, some lid to shut upon
 The goblin ! So they found at Babylon,
 (Colleagues, mad Lucius and sage Antonine)
 Sacking the city, by Apollo's shrine,
 In rummaging among the rarities,
 A certain coffer ; he who made the prize
 Opened it greedily ; and out there curled
 Just such another plague, for half the world
 Was stung. Crawl in then, hag, and couch asquat,
 Keeping that blotchy bosom thick in spot
 Until your time is ripe ! The coffer-lid
 Is fastened, and the coffer safely hid
 Under the Loxian's choicest gifts of gold.

Who will may hear Sordello's story told,
 And how he never could remember when
 He dwelt not at Goito. Calmly, then,
 About this secret lodge of Adelaide's
 Glided his youth away ; beyond the glades
 On the fir-forest's border, and the rim
 Of the low range of mountain, was for him
 No other world : but this appeared his own
 To wander through at pleasure and alone.
 The castle too seemed empty ; far and wide
 Might he disport ; only the northern side
 Lay under a mysterious interdict —

Slight, just enough remembered to restrict
His roaming to the corridors, the vault
Where those font-bearers expiate their fault,
The maple-chamber, and the little nooks
And nests, and breezy parapet that looks
Over the woods to Mantua: there he strolled.
Some foreign women-servants, very old,
Tended and crept about him — all his clew
To the world's business and embroiled ado
Distant a dozen hill-tops at the most.

And first a simple sense of life engrossed
Sordello in his drowsy Paradise ;
The day's adventures for the day suffice —
Its constant tribute of perceptions strange,
With sleep and stir in healthy interchange,
Suffice, and leave him for the next at ease
Like the great palmer-worm that strips the trees,
Eats the life out of every luscious plant,
And, when September finds them sere or scant,
Puts forth two wondrous winglets, alters quite,
And hies him after unforeseen delight.
So fed Sordello, not a shard disheathed ;
As ever, round each new discovery, wreathed
Luxuriantly the fancies infantine
His admiration, bent on making fine
Its novel friend at any risk, would fling
In gay profusion forth: a ficklest king,
Confessed those minions! Eager to dispense
So much from his own stock of thought and sense

As might enable each to stand alone
 And serve him for a fellow ; with his own,
 Joining the qualities that just before
 Had graced some older favorite. Thus they wore
 A fluctuating halo, yesterday
 Set flicker and to-morrow filched away, —
 Those upland objects each of separate name,
 Each with an aspect never twice the same,
 Waxing and waning as the new-born host
 Of fancies, like a single night's hoar-frost,
 Gave to familiar things a face grotesque ;
 Only, preserving through the mad burlesque
 A grave regard. Conceive ! the orpine-patch
 Blossoming earliest on the log-house-thatch
 The day those archers wound along the vines —
 Related to the Chief that left their lines
 To climb with clinking step the northern stair
 Up to the solitary chambers where
 Sordello never came. Thus thrall reached thrall ;
 He o'er-festooning every interval,
 As the adventurous spider, making light
 Of distance, shoots her threads from depth to height,
 From barbican to battlement ; so flung
 Fantasies forth and in their centre swung
 Our architect, — the breezy morning fresh
 Above, and merry, — all his waving mesh
 Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbow-edged.
 This world of ours by tacit pact is pledged
 To laying such a spangled fabric low

Whether by gradual brush or gallant blow.
 But its abundant will was balked here: doubt
 Rose tardily in one so fenced about
 From most that nurtures judgment, care and pain:
 Judgment, that dull expedient we are fain,
 Less favored, to adopt betimes and force
 Stead us, diverted from our natural course
 Of joys, — contrive some yet amid the dearth,
 Vary and render them, it may be, worth.
 Most we forego. Suppose Sordello hence
 Selfish enough, without a moral sense
 However feeble; what informed the boy
 Others desired a portion in his joy?
 Or say a ruthless chance broke woof and warp —
 A heron's nest beat down by March winds sharp,
 A fawn breathless beneath the precipice,
 A bird with unsoiled breast and filmless eyes
 Warm in the brake — could these undo the trance
 Lapping Sordello? Not a circumstance
 That makes for you, friend Naddo! Eat fern-seed
 And peer beside us and report indeed
 If (your word) "genius" dawned with throes and
 stings
 And the whole fiery catalogue, while springs
 Summers and winters quietly came and went.
 Time put at length that period to content,
 By right the world should have imposed: bereft
 Of its good offices, Sordello, left
 To study his companions, managed rip

Their fringe off, learn the true relationship,
 Core with its crust, their natures with his own :
 Amid his wild-wood sights he lived alone.
 As if the poppy felt with him ! Though he
 Partook the poppy's red effrontery
 Till Autumn spoiled their fleering quite with rain,
 And, turbanless, a coarse brown rattling crane
 Lay bare. That's gone ! Yet why renounce, for
 that,
 His disenchanted tributaries — flat
 Perhaps, but scarce so utterly forlorn,
 Their simple presence might not well be borne
 Whose parley was a transport once ; recall
 The poppy's gifts, it flaunts you, after all,
 A poppy : why distrust the evidence
 Of each soon satisfied and healthy sense ?
 The new-born judgment answered : " little boots
 Beholding other creatures' attributes
 And having none ! " or, say that it sufficed,
 " Yet, could one but possess, one's self," (enticed
 Judgment) " some special office ! " Naught beside
 Serves you ? " Well, then, be somehow justified
 For this ignoble wish to circumscribe
 And concentrate, rather than swell, the tribe
 Of actual pleasures : what, now, from without
 Effects it ? — proves, despite a lurking doubt,
 Mere sympathy sufficient, trouble spared ?
 That tasting joys by proxy thus, you fared
 The better for them ? " Thus much craved his soul.

Alas, from the beginning love is whole
 And true ; if sure of naught beside, most sure
 Of its own truth at least ; nor may endure
 A crowd to see its face, that cannot know
 How hot the pulses throb its heart below.
 While its own helplessness and utter want
 Of means to worthily be ministrant
 To what it worships, do but fan the more
 Its flame, exalt the idol far before
 Itself as it would have it ever be.
 Souls like Sordello, on the contrary,
 Coerced and put to shame, retaining will,
 Care little, take mysterious comfort still,
 But look forth tremblingly to ascertain
 If others judge their claims not urged in vain,
 And say for them their stifled thoughts aloud.
 So, they must ever live before a crowd :
 — “ Vanity,” Naddo tells you.

Whence contrive

A crowd, now ? From these women just alive,
 That archer-troop ? Forth glided — not alone
 Each painted warrior, every girl of stone,
 Nor Adelaide (bent double o’er a scroll,
 One maiden at her knees, that eve, his soul
 Shook as he stumbled through the arras’d glooms
 On them, for, ’mid quaint robes and weird perfumes,
 Started the meagre Tuscan up, — her eyes,
 The maiden’s, also, bluer with surprise)
 — But the entire out-world : whatever, scraps

And snatches, song and story, dreams perhaps,
 Conceited the world's offices, and he
 Had hitherto transferred to flower or tree,
 Nor counted a befitting heritage
 Each, of its own right, singly to engage
 Some man, no other, — such now dared to stand
 Alone. Strength, wisdom, grace on every hand
 Soon disengaged themselves, and he discerned
 A sort of human life . at least, was turned
 A stream of lifelike figures through his brain.
 Lord, liegeman, valvassor and suzerain,
 Ere he could choose, surrounded him ; a stuff
 To work his pleasure on ; there, sure enough :
 But as for gazing, what shall fix that gaze ?
 Are they to simply testify the ways
 He who convoked them sends his soul along
 With the cloud's thunder or a dove's brood-song ?
 — While they live each his life, boast each his own
 Peculiar dower of bliss, stand each alone
 In some one point where something dearest loved
 Is easiest gained — far worthier to be proved
 Than aught he envies in the forest-wights !
 No simple and self-evident delights,
 But mixed desires of unimagined range,
 Contrasts or combinations, new and strange,
 Irsome perhaps, yet plainly recognized
 By this, the sudden company — loves prized
 By those who are to prize his own amount
 Of loves. Once care because such make account,

Allow a foreign recognition stamp
 The current value, and his crowd shall vamp
 Him counterfeits enough; and so their print
 Be on the piece, 't is gold, attests the mint,
 And "good," pronounce they whom his new appeal
 Is made to: if their casual print conceal —
 This arbitrary good of theirs o'ergloss
 What he have lived without, nor felt the loss —
 Qualities strange, ungainly, wearisome,
 — What matter? so must speech expand the dumb
 Part-sigh, part-smile with which Sordello, late
 No foolish woodland-sights could satiate,
 Betakes himself to study hungrily
 Just what the puppets his crude fantasy
 Supposes notablest, popes, kings, priests, knights,
 May please to promulgate for appetites;
 Accepting all their artificial joys
 Not as he views them, but as he employs
 Each shape to estimate the other's stock
 Of attributes, that on a marshalled flock
 Of authorized enjoyments he may spend
 Himself, be men, now, as he used to blend
 With tree and flower — nay more entirely, else
 'T were mockery: for instance, "how excels
 My life that chieftain's?" (who apprised the youth
 Ecelin, here, becomes this month, in truth,
 Imperial Vicar?) "Turns he in his tent
 Remissly? Be it so — my head is bent
 Deliciously amid my girls to sleep.

What if he stalks the Trentine-pass? Yon steep
 I climbed an hour ago with little toil —
 We are alike there. But can I, too, foil
 The Guelfs' paid stabber, carelessly afford
 Saint Mark's a spectacle, the sleight o' the sword
 Baffling their project in a moment?" Here
 No rescue! Poppy he is none, but peer
 To Ecelin, assuredly: his hand,
 Fashioned no otherwise, should wield a brand
 With Ecelin's success — try, now! He soon
 Was satisfied, returned as to the moon
 From earth; left each abortive boy's-attempt
 For feats, from failure happily exempt,
 In fancy at his beck. "One day I will
 Accomplish it! Are they not older still
 — Not grown up men and women? 'T is beside
 Only a dream; and though I must abide
 With dreams now, I may find a thorough vent
 For all myself, acquire an instrument
 For acting what these people act; my soul
 Hunting a body out, may gain its whole
 Desire some day!" How else express chagrin
 And resignation, show the hope steal in
 With which he let sink from an aching wrist
 The rough-hewn ash bow? straight, a gold shaft hissed
 Into the Syrian air, struck Malek down
 Superbly! "Crosses to the breach! God's Town
 Is gained Him back!" Why bend rough ash-bows
 more?

Thus lives he: if not careless as before,
 Comforted: for one may anticipate,
 Rehearse the Future, be prepared when fate
 Shall have prepared in turn real men whose names
 Startle, real places of enormous fames,
 Este abroad and Ecelin at home
 To worship him, — Mantua, Verona, Rome
 To witness it. Who grudges time so spent?
 Rather test qualities to heart's content —
 Summon them, thrice selected, near and far —
 Compress the starriest into one star,
 And grasp the whole at once!

The pageant thinned

Accordingly; from rank to rank, like wind
 His spirit passed to winnow and divide;
 Back fell the simpler phantasms; every side
 The strong clave to the wise; with either classed
 The beauteous; so, till two or three amassed
 Mankind's beseeemingnesses, and reduced
 Themselves eventually, graces loosed,
 And lavished strengths, to heighten up One Shape
 Whose potency no creature should escape.
 Can it be Friedrich of the bowmen's talk?
 Surely that grape-juice, bubbling at the stalk,
 Is some gray scorching Saracenic wine
 The Kaiser quaffs with the Miramoline —
 Those swarthy hazel-clusters, seamed and chapped,
 Or filberts russet-sheathed and velvet-capped,
 Are dates plucked from the bough John Brienne sent,

To keep in mind his sluggish armament
 Of Canaan. — Friedrich's, all the pomp and fierce
 Demeanor ! But harsh sounds and sights transpierce
 So rarely the serene cloud where he dwells,
 Whose looks enjoin, whose lightest words are spells
 On the obdurate ! That right arm indeed
 Has thunder for its slave ; but where's the need
 Of thunder if the stricken multitude
 Harkens, arrested in its angriest mood,
 While songs go up exulting, then disspread,
 Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead
 Like an escape of angels ? 'T is the tune,
 Nor much unlike the words the women croon
 Smilingly, colorless and faint-designed
 Each, as a worn-out queen's face some remind
 Of her extreme youth's love-tales. "Eglamor
 Made that !" Half minstrel and half emperor,
 What but ill objects vexed him ? Such he slew.
 The kinder sort were easy to subdue
 By those ambrosial glances, dulcet tones ;
 And these a gracious hand advanced to thrones
 Beneath him. Wherefore twist and torture this,
 Striving to name afresh the antique bliss,
 Instead of saying, neither less nor more,
 He had discovered, as our world before,
 Apollo ? That shall be the name ; nor bid
 Me rag by rag expose how patchwork hid
 The youth — what thefts of every clime and day
 Contributed to purfle the array

He climbed with (June at deep) some close ravine
 'Mid clatter of its million pebbles sheen,
 Over which, singing soft, the runnel slipt
 Elate with rains: into whose streamlet dipt
 He foot, yet trod, you thought, with unwet sock —
 Though really on the stubs of living rock
 Ages ago it crenneled; vines for roof,
 Lindens for wall; before him, aye aloof,
 Flittered in the cool some azure damsel-fly,
 Born of the simmering quiet, there to die.
 Emerging whence, Apollo still, he spied
 Mighty descents of forest; multiplied
 Tuft on tuft, here, the frolic myrtle-trees,
 There gendered the grave maple-stocks at ease.
 And, proud of its observer, strait the wood
 Tried old surprises on him; black it stood
 A sudden barrier ('t was a cloud passed o'er)
 So dead and dense, the tiniest brute no more
 Must pass; yet presently (the cloud despatched)
 Each clump, behold, was glistening detached
 A shrub, oak-boles shrunk into ilex-stems!
 Yet could not he denounce the stratagems
 He saw thro', till, hours thence, aloft would hang
 White summer-lightnings; as it sank and sprang
 To measure, that whole palpitating breast
 Of heaven, 't was Apollo, nature prest
 At eve to worship.

Time stole: by degrees

The Pythons perish off; his votaries

Sink to respectful distance ; songs redeem
 Their pains, but briefer ; their dismissals seem
 Emphatic ; only girls are very slow
 To disappear — his Delians ! Some that glow
 O' the instant, more with earlier loves to wrench
 Away, reserves to quell, disdains to quench ;
 Alike in one material circumstance —
 All soon or late adore Apollo ! Glance
 The bevy through, divine Apollo's choice,
 His Daphne ! “ We secure Count Richard's voice
 In Este's counsels, good for Este's ends
 As our Taurello,” say his faded friends,
 “ By granting him our Palma ! ” — The sole child,
 They mean, of Agnes Este who beguiled
 Ecelin, years before this Adelaide
 Wedded and turned him wicked : “ but the maid
 Rejects his suit,” those sleepy women boast.
 She, scorning all beside, deserves the most
 Sordello : so, conspicuous in his world
 Of dreams sat Palma. (How the tresses curled
 Into a sumptuous swell of gold and wound
 About her like a glory ! even the ground
 Was bright as with spilt sunbeams ; breathe not, breathe
 Not ! — poised, see, one leg doubled underneath
 Its small foot buried in the dimpling snow,
 Rests, but the other, listlessly below,
 O'er the couch-side swings feeling for cool air,
 The vein-streaks swoln a richer violet where
 The languid blood lies heavily ; yet calm

On her slight prop, each flat and outspread palm,
 As but suspended in the act to rise
 By consciousness of beauty, whence her eyes
 Turn with so frank a triumph, for she meets
 Apollo's gaze in the pine-glooms.

Time fleets :

That's worst ! Because the pre-appointed age
 Approaches. Fate is tardy with the stage
 And crowd she promised. Lean he grows and pale,
 Though restlessly at rest. Hardly avail
 Fancies to soothe him. Time steals, yet alone
 He tarries here ! The earnest smile is gone.
 How long this might continue, matters not ;
 — For ever, possibly ; since to the spot
 None come : our lingering Taurello quits
 Mantua at last, and light our lady flits
 Back to her place disburdened of a care.
 Strange — to be constant here if he is there !
 Is it distrust ? O, never ! for they both
 Goad Ecelin alike — Romano's growth
 So daily manifest, that Azzo's dumb
 And Richard wavers : let but Friedrich come !
 — Find matter for the minstrelsy's report,
 Lured from the Isle and its young Kaiser's court
 To sing us a Messina morning up,
 And, double rillet of a drinking-cup,
 Sparkle along to ease the land of drouth,
 Northward to Provence that, and thus far south
 The other. What a method to apprise

Neighbors of births, espousals, obsequies !
Which in their very tongue the Troubadour
Records ; and his performance makes a tour,
For Trouveres bear the miracle about,
Explain its cunning to the vulgar rout,
Until the Formidable House is famed
Over the country — as Taurello aimed,
Who introduced, although the rest adopt,
The novelty. Such games, her absence stopped,
Begin afresh now Adelaide, recluse
No longer, in the light of day pursues
Her plans at Mantua : whence an accident
Which, breaking on Sordello's mixed content,
Opened, like any flash that cures the blind,
The veritable business of mankind.

BOOK THE SECOND.

THIS BUBBLE OF FANCY,

THE woods were long austere with snow : at last
Pink leaflets budded on the beech, and fast
Larches, scattered through pine-tree solitudes,
Brightened, "as in the slumbrous heart o' the woods
Our buried year, a witch, grew young again
To placid incantations, and that stain
About were from her cauldron, green smoke blent
With those black pines" — so Eglamor gave vent
To a chance fancy. Whence a just rebuke
From his companion ; brother Naddo shook
The solemnest of brows ; "Beware," he said,
"Of setting up conceits in nature's stead !"
Forth wandered our Sordello. Naught so sure
As that to-day's adventure will secure
Palma, the visioned lady — only pass
O'er yon damp mound and its exhausted grass,
Under that brake where sundawn feeds the stalks
Of withered fern with gold, into those walks
Of pine, and take her ! Buoyantly he went.
Again his stooping forehead was besprent
With dew-drops from the skirting ferns. Then wide
Opened the great morass, shot every side
With flashing water through and through ; a-shine,

Thick-steaming, all alive. Whose shape divine
 Quivered i' the farthest rainbow-vapour, glanced
 Athwart the flying herons? He advanced,
 But warily; though Mincio leaped no more,
 Each footfall burst up in the marish-floor
 A diamond jet: and if he stopped to pick
 Rose-lichen, or molest the leeches quick,
 And circling blood-worms, minnow, newt or loach,
 A sudden pond would silently encroach
 This way and that. On Palma passed. The verge
 Of a new wood was gained. She will emerge
 Flushed, now, and panting, — crowds to see, — will own
 She loves him — Boniface to hear, to groan,
 To leave his suit! One screen of pine-trees still
 Opposes; but — the startling spectacle —
 Mantua, this time! Under the walls — a crowd
 Indeed, real men and women, gay and loud
 Round a pavilion. How he stood!

In truth

No prophecy had come to pass: his youth
 In its prime now — and where was homage poured
 Upon Sordello? — born to be adored,
 And suddenly discovered weak, scarce made
 To cope with any, cast into the shade
 By this and this. Yet something seemed to prick
 And tingle in his blood; a sleight — a trick —
 And much would be explained. It went for naught —
 The best of their endowments were ill bought
 With his identity; nay, the conceit,

That this day's roving led to Palma's feet
 Was not so vain — list! The word, "Palma!" Steal
 Aside, and die, Sordello; this is real,
 And this — abjure!

What next? The curtains, see,
 Dividing! She is there; and presently
 He will be there — the proper You, at length —
 In your own cherished dress of grace and strength:
 Most like, the very Boniface!

Not so.

It was a showy man advanced; but though
 A glad cry welcomed him, then every sound
 Sank and the crowd disposed themselves around,
 — "This is not he," Sordello felt; while, "Place
 For the best Troubadour of Boniface!"
 Hollaed the Jongleurs, — "Eglamor, whose lay
 Concludes his patron's Court of Love to-day!"
 Obsequious Naddo strung the master's lute
 With the new lute-string, "Elys," named to suit
 The song: he stealthily at watch, the while,
 Biting his lip to keep down a great smile
 Of pride: then up he struck. Sordello's brain
 Swam; for he knew a sometime deed again;
 So, could supply each foolish gap and chasm
 The minstrel left in his enthusiasm,
 Mistaking its true version — was the tale
 Not of Apollo? Only, what avail
 Luring her down, that Elys an he pleased,
 If the man dared no further? Has he ceased?

And, lo, the people's frank applause half done,
 Sordello was beside him, had begun
 (Spite of indignant twitchings from his friend
 The Trouvere) the true lay with the true end,
 Taking the other's names and time and place
 For his. On flew the song, a giddy race,
 After the flying story; word made leap
 Out word, rhyme — rhyme; the lay could barely keep
 Pace with the action visibly rushing past:
 Both ended. Back fell Naddo more aghast
 Than some Egyptian from the harassed bull
 That wheeled abrupt and, bellowing, fronted full
 His plague, who spied a scarab 'neath his tongue,
 And found 't was Apis' flank his hasty prong
 Insulted. But the people — but the cries,
 The crowding round, and proffering the prize!
 (For he had gained some prize) — He seemed to shrink
 Into a sleepy cloud, just at whose brink
 One sight withheld him. There sat Adelaide,
 Silent; but at her knees the very maid
 Of the North Chamber, her red lips as rich,
 The same pure fleecy hair; one weft of which,
 Golden and great, quite touched his cheek as o'er
 She leant, speaking some six words and no more.
 He answered something, anything; and she
 Unbound a scarf and laid it heavily
 Upon him, her neck's warmth and all. Again
 Moved the arrested magic; in his brain
 Noises grew, and a light that turned to glare,

And greater glare, until the intense flare
Engulfed him, shut the whole scene from his sense.
And when he woke 't was many a furlong thence,
At home ; the sun shining his ruddy wont ;
The customary birds'-chirp ; but his front
Was crowned — was crowned ! Her scented scarf around
His neck ! Whose gorgeous vesture heaps the ground ?
A prize ? He turned, and peeringly on him
Brooded the women-faces, kind and dim,
Ready to talk. — “ The Jongleurs in a troop
Had brought him back, Naddo and Squarcialupe
And Tagliafer ; how strange ! a childhood spent
In taking, well for him, so brave a bent !
Since Eglamor,” they heard, “ was dead with spite,
And Palma chose him for her minstrel.”

Light

Sordello rose — to think, now ; hitherto
He had perceived. Sure, a discovery grew
Out of it all ! Best live from first to last
The transport o'er again. A week he passed,
Sucking the sweet out of each circumstance,
From the bard's outbreak to the luscious trance
Bounding his own achievement. Strange ! A man
Recounted an adventure, but began
Imperfectly ; his own task was to fill
The framework up, sing well what he sang ill,
Supply the necessary points, set loose
As many incidents of little use
— More imbecile the other, not to see

Their relative importance clear as he !
 But, for a special pleasure in the act
 Of singing — had he ever turned, in fact,
 From Elys, to sing Elys ? — from each fit
 Of rapture, to contrive a song of it ?
 True, this snatch or the other seemed to wind
 Into a treasure, helped himself to find
 A beauty in himself ; for, see, he soared
 By means of that mere snatch to many a hoard
 Of fancies ; as some falling cone bears soft
 The eye, along the fir-tree-spire, aloft
 To a dove's nest. Then, how divine the cause
 Such a performance might exact applause
 From men, if they had fancies too ? Could fate
 Decree they found a beauty separate
 In the poor snatch itself ? — “ Take Elys, there,
 — ‘ Her head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,
 So close and smooth are laid the few fine locks
 Colored like honey oozed from topmost rocks
 Sun-blanced the livelong summer ’ — if they heard
 Just those two rhymes, assented at my word,
 And loved them as I love them who have run
 These fingers through those pale locks, let the sun
 Into the white cool skin — who first could clutch,
 Then praise — I needs must be a God to such.
 Or if some few, above themselves, and yet
 Beneath me, like their Eglamor, have set
 An impress on our gift ? \ So, men believe
 And worship what they know not, nor receive

Delight from. Have they fancies — slow, perchance,
 Not at their beck, which indistinctly glance
 Until, by song, each floating part be linked
 To each, and all grow palpable, distinct ?”
 He pondered this.

Meanwhile, sounds low and drear
 Stole on him, and a noise of footsteps, near
 And nearer, and the underwood was pushed
 Aside, the larches grazed, the dead leaves crushed
 At the approach of men. The wind seemed laid ;
 Only, the trees shrunk slightly and a shade
 Came o'er the sky although 't was midday yet :
 You saw each half-shut downcast floweret
 Flutter — “a Roman bride, when they'd dispart
 Her unbound tresses with the Sabine dart,
 Holding that famous rape in memory still,
 Felt creep into her curls the iron chill,
 And looked thus,” Eglamor would say — indeed
 'T is Eglamor, no other, these precede
 Home hither in the woods. “'T were surely sweet
 Far from the scene of one's forlorn defeat
 To sleep !” judged Naddo, who in person led
 Jongleurs and Trouveres, chanting at their head,
 A scanty company ; for, sooth to say,
 Our beaten Troubadour had seen his day.
 Old worshippers were something shamed, old friends
 Nigh weary ; still the death proposed amends.
 “Let us but get them safely through my song
 And home again !” quoth Naddo.

All along,
 This man (they rest the bier upon the sand)
 — This calm corpse with the loose flowers in his hand,
 Eglamor, lived Sordello's opposite.
 For him indeed was Naddo's notion right,
 And verse a temple-worship vague and vast,
 A ceremony that withdrew the last
 Opposing bolt, looped back the lingering veil
 Which hid the holy place — should one so frail
 Stand there without such effort? or repine
 That much was blank, uncertain at the shrine
 He knelt before, till, soothed by many a rite,
 The Power responded, and some sound or sight
 Grew up, his own forever, to be fixed
 In rhyme, the beautiful, forever ! mixed
 With his own life, unloosed when he should please,
 Having it safe at hand, ready to ease
 All pain, remove all trouble ; every time
 He loosed that fancy from its bonds of rhyme,
 Like Perseus when he loosed his naked love,
 Faltering ; so distinct and far above
 Himself, these fancies ! He, no genius rare,
 Transfiguring in fire or wave or air
 At will, but a poor gnome that, cloistered up
 In some rock-chamber with his agate cup,
 His topaz rod, his seed-pearl, in these few
 And their arrangement finds enough to do
 For his best art. Then, how he loved that art !
 The calling marking him a man apart

From men — one not to care, take counsel for
 Cold hearts, comfortless faces — (Eglamor
 Was neediest of his tribe) — since verse, the gift,
 Was his, and men, the whole of them, must shift
 Without it, e'en content themselves with wealth
 And pomp and power, snatching a life by stealth.
 So, Eglamor was not without his pride !
 The sorriest bat which cowers through noontide
 While other birds are jocund, has one time
 When moon and stars are blinded, and the prime
 Of earth is his to claim, nor find a peer ;
 And Eglamor was noblest poet here
 He knew that, 'mid the April woods, he cast
 Conceits upon in plenty as he past,
 That Naddo might suppose him not to think
 Entirely on the coming triumph : wink
 At the one weakness ! 'T was a fervid child,
 That song of his — no brother of the guild
 Had e'er conceived its like. The rest you know,
 The exaltation and the overthrow :
 Our poet lost his purpose, lost his rank,
 His life — to that it came. Yet envy sank
 Within him, as he heard Sordello out,
 And, for the first time, shouted — tried to shout
 Like others, not from any zeal to show
 Pleasure that way : the common sort did so,
 And what was Eglamor ? who, bending down
 The same, placed his beneath Sordello's crown,
 Printed a kiss on his successor's hand,

Left one great tear on it, then joined his band
 — In time ; for some were watching at the door
 Who knows what envy may effect ? “ Give o’er,
 Nor charm his lips, nor craze him ! ” (here one spied
 And disengaged the withered crown) — “ Beside
 His crown ! How prompt and clear those verses rung
 To answer yours ! nay, sing them ! ” And he sung
 Them calmly. Home he went ; friends used to wait
 His coming, zealous to congratulate,
 But, to a man, so quickly runs report,
 Could do no less than leave him, and escort
 His rival. That eve, then, bred many a thought :
 What must his future life be ? was he brought
 So low, who was so lofty this Spring morn ?
 At length he said, “ Best sleep now with my scorn,
 And by to-morrow I devise some plain
 Expedient ! ” So, he slept, nor woke again.
 They found as much, those friends, when they returned
 O’erflowing with the marvels they had learned
 About Sordello’s paradise, his roves
 Among the hills and valleys, plains and groves,
 Wherein, no doubt, this lay was roughly cast,
 Polished by slow degrees, completed last
 To Eglamor’s discomfiture and death.

Such form the chanter now, and, out of breath,
 They lay the beaten man in his abode,
 Naddo reciting that same luckless ode,
 Doleful to hear. Sordello could explore
 By means of it, however, one step more

In joy ; and, mastering the round at length,
 Learnt how to live in weakness as in strength,
 When from his covert forth he stood, addressed
 Eglamor, bade the tender ferns invest,
 Primæval pines o'ercanopy his couch,
 And, most of all, his fame — (shall I avouch
 Eglamor heard it, dead though he might look,
 And laughed as from his brow Sordello took
 The crown, and laid it on his breast, and said
 It was a crown, now, fit for poet's head?)
 — Continue. Nor the prayer quite fruitless fell.
 A plant they have yielding a three-leaved bell
 Which whitens at the heart ere noon, and ails
 Till evening; evening gives it to her gales
 To clear away with such forgotten things
 As are an eyesore to the morn: this brings
 Him to their mind, and bears his very name.

So much for Eglamor. My own month came;
 'T was a sunrise of blossoming and May.
 Beneath a flowering laurel thicket lay
 Sordello; each new sprinkle of white stars
 That smell fainter of wine than Massic jars
 Dug up at Baiæ, when the south wind shed
 The ripest, made him happier; filleted
 And robed the same, only a lute beside
 Lay on the turf. Before him far and wide
 The country stretched: Goito slept behind
 — The castle and its covert, which confined
 Him with his hopes and fears; so fain of old

To leave the story of his birth untold.
 At intervals, 'spite the fantastic glow
 Of his Apollo-life, a certain low
 And wretched whisper, winding through the bliss,
 Admonished, no such fortune could be his,
 All was quite false and sure to fade one day :
 The closelier drew he round him his array
 Of brilliance to expel the truth. \ But when
 A reason for his difference from men
 Surprised him at the grave, he took no rest
 While aught of that old life, superbly drest
 Down to its meanest incident, remained
 A mystery — alas, they soon explained
 Away Apollo ! and the tale amounts
 To this : when at Vicenza both her Counts
 Banished the Vivaresi kith and kin,
 Those Maltraversi hung on Ecelin,
 Reviled him as he followed ; he for spite
 Must fire their quarter, though that self-same night
 Among the flames young Ecelin was born
 Of Adelaide, there too, and barely torn
 From the roused populace hard on the rear,
 By a poor archer when his chieftain's fear
 Grew high ; into the thick Elcorte leapt,
 Saved her, and died ; no creature left except
 His child to thank. And when the full escape
 Was known — how men impaled from chine to nape
 Unlucky Prata, all to pieces spurned
 Bishop Pistore's concubines, and burned

Taurello's entire household, flesh and fell,
 Missing the sweeter prey — such courage well
 Might claim reward. The orphan, ever since,
 Sordello, had been nurtured by his prince
 Within a blind retreat where Adelaide —
 (For, once this notable discovery made,
 The Past at every point was understood)
 — Might harbor easily when times were rude,
 When Azzo schemed for Palma, to retrieve
 That pledge of Agnes Este — loath to leave
 Mantua unguarded with a vigilant eye,
 Taurello biding there ambiguously —
 He who could have no motive now to moil
 For his own fortunes since their utter spoil —
 As it were worth while yet (went the report)
 To disengage himself from her. In short,
 Apollo vanished; a mean youth, just named
 His lady's minstrel, was to be proclaimed
 — How shall I phrase it? — Monarch of the World!
 For, on the morning that array was furled
 Forever, and in place of one a slave
 To longings, wild indeed, but longings save
 In dreams as wild, suppressed — one daring not
 Assume the mastery such dreams allot,
 Until a magical equipment, strength
 Grace, wisdom, decked him too, — he chose at length,
 Content with unproved wits and failing frame,
 In virtue of his simple will, to claim
 That mastery, no less — to do his best

With means so limited, and let the rest
 Go by, — the seal was set: never again
 Sordello could in his own sight remain
 One of the many, one with hopes and cares
 And interests nowise distinct from theirs,
 Only peculiar in a thriveless store
 Of fancies, which were fancies and no more;
 Never again for him and for the crowd
 A common law was challenged and allowed
 If calmly reasoned of, howe'er denied
 By a mad impulse nothing justified
 Short of Apollo's presence. The divorce
 Is clear: why needs Sordello square his course
 By any known example? Men no more
 Compete with him than tree and flower before;
 Himself, inactive, yet is greater far
 Than such as act, each stooping to his star,
 Acquiring thence his function; he has gained
 The same result with meaner mortals trained
 To strength or beauty, moulded to express
 Each the idea that rules him; since no less
 He comprehends that function, but can still
 Embrace the others, take of might his fill
 With Richard as of grace with Palma, mix
 Their qualities, or for a moment fix
 On one; abiding free meantime, uncramped
 By any partial organ, never stamped
 Strong, and to strength turning all energies —
 Wise, and restricted to becoming wise —

That is, he loves not, nor possesses One
 Idea that, star-like over, lures him on
 To its exclusive purpose. "Fortunate!
 This flesh of mine ne'er strove to emulate
 A soul so various — took no casual mould
 Of the first fancy and, contracted, cold,
 Lay clogged forever thence, averse to change
 As that: whereas it left her free to range,
 Remains itself a blank, cast into shade,
 Encumbers little, if it cannot aid.
 So, range, *my soul*! — who, by self-consciousness,
 The last drop of all beauty dost express —
 The grace of seeing grace, a quintessence
 For thee: but for the world, that can dispense
 Wonder on men who, themselves, wonder — make
 A shift to love at second-hand, and take
 Those for its idols who but idolize,
 Themselves, — world that loves souls as strong or wise,
 Who, themselves, love strength, wisdom, — it shall bow
 Surely in unexampled worship now,
 Discerning me!" —

(Dear monarch, I beseech,

Notice how lamentably wide a breach
 Is here! discovering this, discover too
 What our poor world has possibly to do
 With it! As pygmy natures as you please —
 So much the better for you; take your ease;
 Look on, and laugh; style yourself God alone;
 Strangle some day with a cross olive-stone:

All that is right enough : but why want us
 To know that you yourself know thus and thus ?)
 " The world shall bow to me conceiving all
 Man's life, who sees its blisses, great and small,
 Afar — not tasting any ; no machine
 To exercise my utmost will is mine :
 Be mine mere consciousness ! Let them perceive
 What I could do, a mastery believe,
 Asserted and established to the throng
 By their selected evidence of song
 Which now shall prove, whate'er they are, or seek
 To be, I am — who take no pains to speak,
 Change no old standards of perfection, vex
 With no strange forms created to perplex,
 But will perform their bidding and no more,
 At their own satiating-point give o'er,
 While each shall love in me the love that leads
 His soul to its perfection." Song, not deeds,
 (For we get tired) was chosen. Fate would brook
 Mankind no other organ ; he would look
 For not another channel to dispense
 His own volition, and receive their sense
 Of its existing ; but would be content,
 Obstructed else, with merely verse for vent.
 Nor should, for instance, strength an outlet seek
 And, striving, be admired, nor grace bespeak
 Wonder, displayed in gracious attitudes ;
 Nor wisdom, poured forth, change unseemly moods :
 But he would give and take on song's one point.

Like some huge throbbing-stone that, poised a-joint,
 Sounds, to affect on its basaltic bed,
 Must sue in just one accent; tempests shed
 Thunder, and raves the landstorm: only let
 That key by any little noise be set —
 The far benighted hunter's halloo pitch
 On that, the hungry curlew chance to scritch
 Or serpent hiss it, rustling through the rift,
 However loud, however low — all lift
 The groaning monster, stricken to the heart.

Lo ye, the world's concernment, for its part,
 And this, for his, will hardly interfere!
 Its businesses in blood and blaze this year
 But wile the hour away — a pastime slight
 Till he shall step upon the platform: right!
 And, now thus much is settled, cast in rough,
 Proved feasible, be counselled! thought enough, —
 Slumber, Sordello! any day will serve:
 Were it a less digested plan! how swerve
 To-morrow? Meanwhile eat these sun-dried grapes,
 And watch the soaring hawk there! Life escapes
 Merrily thus.

He thoroughly read o'er
 His truchman Naddo's missive six times more,
 Praying him visit Mantua and supply
 A famished world.

The evening star was high
 When he reached Mantua, but his fame arrived
 Before him: friends applauded, foes connived,

And Naddo looked an angel, and the rest
 Angels, and all these angels would be blest
 Supremely by a song — the thrice-renowned
 Goito manufacture. Then he found
 (Casting about to satisfy the crowd)
 That happy vehicle, so late allowed,
 A sore annoyance: 't was the song's effect
 He cared for, scarce the song itself: reflect!
 In the past life, what might be singing's use?
 Just to delight his Delians, whose profuse
 Praise, not the toilsome process which procured
 That praise, enticed Apollo: dreams abjured,
 No over-leaping means for ends — take both
 For granted or take neither! I am loath
 To say the rhymes at last were Eglamor's;
 But Naddo, chuckling, bade competitors
 Go pine; "the master certes meant to waste
 No effort, cautiously had probed the taste
 He 'd please anon: true bard, in short, disturb
 His title if they could; nor spur nor curb,
 Fancy nor reason, wanting in him; whence
 The staple of his verses, common sense:
 He built on man's broad nature — gift of gifts,
 That power to build! The world contented shifts
 With counterfeits enough, a dreary sort
 Of warriors, statesmen, ere it can extort
 Its poet-soul — that's, after all, a freak
 (The having eyes to see and tongue to speak)
 With our herd's stupid sterling happiness

So plainly incompatible that — yes —
 Yes — should a son of his improve the breed
 And turn out poet, he were cursed indeed !”
 “ Well, there’s Goito and its woods anon,
 If the worst happen ; best go stoutly on
 Now !” thought Sordello.

Ay, and goes on yet !

You pother with your glossaries to get
 A notion of the Troubadour’s intent
 In rondel, tenzon, virlai or sirvent —
 Much as you study arras how to twirl
 His angelot, plaything of page and girl,
 Once ; but you surely reach, at last, — or, no !
 Never quite reach what struck the people so,
 As from the welter of their time he drew
 Its elements successively to view,
 Followed all actions backward on their course,
 And catching up, unmingled at the source,
 Such a strength, such a weakness, added then
 A touch or two, and turned them into men.
 Virtue took form, nor vice refused a shape ;
 Here heaven opened, there was hell agape,
 As Saint this simpered past in sanctity,
 Sinner the other flared portentous by
 A greedy people. Then why stop, surprised
 At his success ? The scheme was realized
 Too suddenly in one respect : a crowd
 Praising, eyes quick to see, and lips as loud
 To speak, delicious homage to receive,

The woman's breath to feel upon his sleeve,
 Who said, " But Anafest — why asks he less
 Than Lucio, in your verses ? how confess,
 It seemed too much but yestereve ! " — the youth,
 Who bade him earnestly, " Avow the truth !
 You love Bianca, surely, from your song ;
 I knew I was unworthy ! " — soft or strong,
 In poured such tributes ere he had arranged
 Ethereal ways to take them, sorted, changed,
 Digested. Courted thus at unawares,
 In spite of his pretensions and his cares,
 He caught himself shamefully hankering
 After the obvious petty joys that spring
 From real life, fain relinquish pedestal
 And condescend with pleasures — one and all
 To be renounced, no doubt ; for, thus to chain
 Himself to single joys and so refrain
 From tasting their quintessence, frustrated, sure,
 His prime design ; each joy must he abjure
 Even for love of it.

He laughed : what sage
 But perishes if from his magic page
 He looked because, at the first line, a proof
 'T was heard salutes him from the cavern-roof ?
 " On ! Give yourself, excluding aught beside,
 To the day's task ; compel your slave provide
 Its utmost at the soonest ; turn the leaf
 Thoroughly conned. These lays of yours, in brief —
 Cannot men bear, now, something better ? — fly

A pitch beyond this unreal pageantry
 Of essences ? the period sure has ceased
 For such : present us with ourselves, at least,
 Not portions of ourselves, mere loves and hates
 Made flesh : wait not ! ”

Awhile the poet waits

However. The first trial was enough :
 He left imagining, to try the stuff
 That held the imaged thing, and, let it writhe
 Never so fiercely, scarce allowed a tithe
 To reach the light — his Language. How he sought
 The cause, conceived a cure, and slow re-wrought
 That Language, — welding words into the crude
 Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude
 Armor was hammered out, in time to be
 Approved beyond the Roman panoply
 Melted to make it, — boots not. This obtained
 With some ado, no obstacle remained
 To using it ; accordingly he took
 An action with its actors, quite forsook
 Himself to live in each, returned anon
 With the result — a creature, and, by one
 And one, proceeded leisurely to equip
 Its limbs in harness of his workmanship.
 “ Accomplished ! Listen, Mantuans ! ” Fond essay !
 Piece after piece that armor broke away,
 Because perceptions whole, like that he sought
 To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
 As language : thought may take perception’s place

But hardly coexist in any case,
 Being its mere presentment — of the whole
 By parts, the simultaneous and the sole
 By the successive and the many. Lacks
 The crowd perception? painfully it tacks
 Thought to thought, which Sordello, needing such,
 Has rent perception into: it's to clutch
 And reconstruct — his office to diffuse,
 Destroy: as hard, then, to obtain a Muse
 As to become Apollo. "For the rest,
 E'en if some wondrous vehicle exprest
 The whole dream, what impertinence in me
 So to express it, who myself can be
 The dream! nor, on the other hand, are those
 I sing to, over-likely to suppose
 A higher than the highest I present
 Now, which they praise already: be content
 Both parties, rather — they with the old verse,
 And I with the old praise — far go, fare worse!"
 A few adhering rivets loosed, upsprings
 The angel, sparkles off his mail, and rings
 Whirled from each delicatest limb it warps,
 As might Apollo from the sudden corpse
 Of Hyacinth have cast his luckless quoits.
 He set to celebrating the exploits
 Of Montfort o'er the Mountaineers.

Then came

The world's revenge: their pleasure, now his aim
 Merely, — what was it? "Not to play the fool

So much as learn our lesson in your school!"
 Replied the world. He found that, every time
 He gained applause by any ballad-rhyme,
 His auditory recognized no jot
 As he intended, and, mistaking not
 Him for his meanest hero, ne'er was dunce
 Sufficient to believe him — all, at once.
 His will . . . conceive it caring for his will!
 — Mantuans, the main of them, admiring still
 How a mere singer, ugly, stunted, weak,
 Had Montfort at completely (so to speak)
 His fingers' ends; while past the praise-tide swept
 To Montfort, either's share distinctly kept:
 The true meed for true merit! — his abates
 Into a sort he most repudiates,
 And on them angrily he turns. Who were
 The Mantuans, after all, that he should care
 About their recognition, ay or no?
 In spite of the convention months ago,
 (Why blink the truth?) was not he forced to help
 This same ungrateful audience, every whelp
 Of Naddo's litter, make them pass for peers
 With the bright band of old Goito years,
 As erst he toiled for flower or tree? Why, there
 Sat Palma! Adelaide's funereal hair
 Ennobled the next corner. Ay, he strewed
 A fairy dust upon that multitude,
 Although he feigned to take them by themselves;
 His giants dignified those puny elves,

Sublimed their faint applause. In short, he found
 Himself still footing a delusive round,
 Remote as ever from the self-display
 He meant to compass, hampered every way
 By what he hoped assistance. Wherefore then
 Continue, make believe to find in men
 A use he found not?

Weeks, months, years went by ;

And, lo, Sordello vanished utterly,
 Sundered in twain ; each spectral part at strife
 With each ; one jarred against another life ;
 The Poet thwarting hopelessly the Man
 Who, fooled no longer, free in fancy ran
 Here, there ; let slip no opportunities
 As pitiful, forsooth, beside the prize
 To drop on him some no-time and acquit
 His constant faith (the Poet-half's to wit —
 That waiving any compromise between
 No joy and all joy kept the hunger keen
 Beyond most methods) — of incurring scoff
 From the Man-portion not to be put off
 With self-reflectings by the Poet's scheme,
 Though ne'er so bright ; that sauntered forth in dream,
 Drest any how, nor waited mystic frames,
 Immeasurable gifts, astounding claims,
 But just his sorry self — who yet might be
 Sorrier for aught he in reality
 Achieved, so pinioned That the Poet-part,
 Fondling, in turn of fancy, verse ; the Art

Developing his soul a thousand ways —
 Potent, by its assistance, to amaze
 The multitude with majesties, convince
 Each sort of nature, that same nature's prince
 Accosted it. Language, the makeshift, grew
 Into a bravest of expedients, too ;
 Apollo, seemed it now, perverse had thrown
 Quiver and bow away, the lyre alone
 Sufficed. While, out of dream, his day's work went
 To tune a crazy tenzon or sirvent —
 So hampered him the Man-part, thrust to judge
 Between the bard and the bard's audience, grudge
 A minute's toil that missed its due reward !
 But the complete Sordello, Man and Bard,
 John's cloud-girt angel, this foot on the land,
 That on the sea, with open in his hand
 A bitter-sweetling of a book — was gone.

And if internal struggles to be one
 That frittered him incessantly piecemeal,
 Referred, ne'er so obliquely, to the real
 Mantuans ! intruding ever with some call
 To action while he pondered, once for all,
 Which looked the easier effort — to pursue
 This course, still leap o'er paltry joys, yearn through
 The present ill-appreciated stage
 Of self-revelment, and compel the age
 Know him ; or else, forswearing bard-craft, wake
 From out his lethargy and nobly shake
 Off timid habits of denial, mix

With men, enjoy like men. Ere he could fix
 On aught, in rushed the Mantuans ; much they cared
 For his perplexity ! Thus unprepared,
 The obvious if not only shelter lay
 In deeds, the dull conventions of his day
 Prescribed the like of him : why not be glad
 'T is settled Palma's minstrel, good or bad,
 Submits to this and that established rule ?
 Let Vidal change, or any other fool,
 His murrey-colored robe for philamot,
 And crop his hair ; too skin-deep, is it not,
 Such vigor ? Then, a sorrow to the heart,
 His talk ! Whatever topics they might start,
 Had to be groped for in his consciousness
 Straight, and as straight delivered them by guess.
 Only obliged to ask himself, " What was,"
 A speedy answer followed ; but, alas,
 One of God's large ones, tardy to condense
 Itself into a period ; answers whence
 A tangle of conclusions must be stripped
 At any risk ere, trim to pattern clipped,
 They matched rare specimens the Mantuan flock
 Regaled him with, each talker from his stock
 Of sorted-o'er opinions, every stage,
 Juicy in youth or desiccate with age,
 Fruits like the fig-tree's, rathe-ripe, rotten-rich,
 Sweet-sour, all tastes to take : a practice which
 He too had not impossibly attained,
 Once either of those fancy-flights restrained ;

For, at conjecture how might words appear
 To others, playing there what happened here,
 And occupied abroad by what he spurned
 At home, 't was slipt, the occasion he returned
 To seize : he 'd strike that lyre adroitly — speech,
 Would but a twenty-cubit plectre reach ;
 A clever hand, consummate instrument,
 Were both brought close ; each excellency went
 For nothing else. The question Naddo asked,
 Had just a lifetime moderately tasked
 To answer, Naddo's fashion. More disgust
 And more ! why move his soul, since move it must
 At a minute's notice or as good it failed
 To move at all ? The end was, he retailed
 Some ready-made opinion, put to use
 This quip, that maxim, ventured reproduce
 Gestures and tones — at any folly caught
 Serving to finish with, nor too much sought
 If false or true 't was spoken ; praise and blame
 Of what he said grew pretty well the same
 — Meantime awards to meantime acts : his soul,
 Unequal to the compassing a whole,
 Saw, in a tenth part, less and less to strive
 About. And as for men in turn . . . contrive
 Who could to take eternal interest
 In them, so hate the worst, so love the best !
 Though, in pursuance of his passive plan,
 He hailed, decried the proper way.

As Man

So figured he ; and how as Poet ? Verse
 Came only not to a stand-still. The worse,
 That his poor piece of daily work to do
 Was, not sink under any rivals ; who
 Loudly and loud enough, without these qualms,
 Tuned, from Bocafoli's stark-naked psalms,
 To Plara's sonnets spoilt by toying with,
 " As knops that stud some almug to the pith
 Prickèd for gum, wry thence, and crinklèd worse
 Than pursèd eyelids of a river-horse
 Sunning himself o' the slime when whirrs the
 breeze " —

Gad-fly, that is. He might compete with these !
 But — but —

“ Observe a pompion-twine afloat ;
 Pluck me one cup from off the castle-moat !
 Along with cup you raise leaf, stalk and root,
 The entire surface of the pool to boot.
 So could I pluck a cup, put in one song
 A single sight, did not my hand, too strong,
 Twitch in the least the root-strings of the whole.
 How should externals satisfy my soul ? ”
 “ Why that's precise the error Squarcialupe ”
 (Hazarded Naddo) “ finds ; ‘ the man can't stoop
 To sing us out,’ quoth he, ‘ a mere romance ;
 He'd fain do better than the best, enhance
 The subjects' rarity, work problems out
 Therewith' : now, you're a bard, a bard past doubt,
 And no philosopher ; why introduce

Crotchets like these? fine, surely, but no use
 In poetry — which still must be, to strike,
 Based upon common sense; there's nothing like
 Appealing to our nature! what beside
 Was your first poetry? No tricks were tried
 In that, no hollow thrills, affected throes!
 'The man,' said we, 'tells his own joys and woes —
 We'll trust him.' Would you have your songs endure?
 Build on the human heart! — Why, to be sure
 Yours is one sort of heart — but I mean theirs,
 Ours, every one's, the healthy heart one cares
 To build on! Central peace, mother of strength,
 That's father of . . . nay, go yourself that length,
 Ask those calm-hearted doers what they do
 When they have got their calm! And is it true,
 Fire rankles at the heart of every globe?
 Perhaps! But these are matters one may probe
 Too deeply for poetic purposes:
 Rather select a theory that . . . yes,
 Laugh! what does that prove? — stations you midway
 And saves some little o'er-refining. Nay,
 That's rank injustice done me! I restrict
 The poet? Don't I hold the poet picked
 Out of a host of warriors, statesman . . . did
 I tell you? Very like! As well you hid
 That sense of power, you have! True bards believe
 All able to achieve what they achieve —
 That is, just nothing — in one point abide
 Profounder simpletons than all beside.

Oh, ay ! The knowledge that you are a bard
 Must constitute your prime, nay sole, reward ! ”
 So prattled Naddo, busiest of the tribe
 Of genius-haunters — how shall I describe
 What grubs or nips, or rubs, or rips — your louse
 For love, your flea for hate, magnanimous,
 Malignant, Pappacoda, Tagliafer,
 Picking a sustenance from wear and tear
 By implements it sedulous employs
 To undertake, lay down, mete out, o’er-toise
 Sordello ? Fifty creepers to elude
 At once ! They settled stanchly ; shame ensued :
 Behold the monarch of mankind succumb
 To the last fool who turned him round his thumb,
 As Naddo styled it ! ’T was not worth oppose
 The matter of a moment, gainsay those
 He aimed at getting rid of ; better think
 Their thoughts and speak their speech, secure to slink
 Back expeditiously to his safe place,
 And chew the cud — what he and what his race
 Were really, each of them. Yet even this
 Conformity was partial. He would miss
 Some point, brought into contact with them ere
 Assured in what small segment of the sphere
 Of his existence they attended him ;
 Whence blunders — falsehoods rectify — a grim
 List — slur it over ! How ? If dreams were tried,
 His will swayed sicklily from side to side,
 Nor merely neutralized his waking act

But tended e'en in fancy to distract
 The intermediate will, the choice of means.
 He lost the art of dreaming: Mantuan scenes
 Supplied a baron, say, he sung before,
 Handsomely reckless, full to running o'er
 Of gallantries; "abjure the soul, content
 With body, therefore!" Scarcely had he bent
 Himself in dream thus low, when matter fast
 Cried out, he found, for spirit to contrast
 And task it duly; by advances slight,
 The simple stuff becoming composite,
 Count Lori grew Apollo — best recall
 His fancy! Then would some rough peasant-Paul,
 Like those old Ecelin confers with, glance
 His gay apparel o'er; that countenance
 Gathered his shattered fancy into one,
 And, body clean abolished, soul alone
 Sufficed the gray Paulician: by and by,
 To balance the ethereality,
 Passions were needed; foiled he sunk again.

Meanwhile the world rejoiced ('t is time explain)
 Because a sudden sickness set it free
 From Adelaide. Missing the mother-bee,
 Her mountain-hive Romano swarmed; at once
 A rustle-forth of daughters and of sons
 Blackened the valley. "I am sick too, old,
 Half crazed I think; what good's the Kaiser's gold
 To such an one? God help me! for I catch
 My children's greedy sparkling eyes at watch —

He bears that double breastplate on, they say,
 So many minutes less than yesterday !
 Beside, Monk Hilary is on his knees
 Now, sworn to kneel and pray till God shall please
 Exact a punishment for many things
 You know, and some you never knew ; which brings
 To memory, Azzo's sister Beatrix
 And Richard's Giglia are my Alberic's
 And Ecelin's betrothed ; the Count himself
 Must get my Palma : Ghibellin and Guelf
 Mean to embrace each other." So began
 Romano's missive to his fighting-man
 Taurello — on the Tuscan's death, away
 With Friedrich sworn to sail from Naples' bay
 Next month for Syria. Never thunder-clap
 Out of Vesuvius' throat, like this mishap
 Startled him. "That accursed Vicenza ! I
 Absent, and she selects this time to die !
 Ho, fellows, for Vicenza !" Half a score
 Of horses ridden dead, he stood before
 Romano in his reeking spurs : too late —
 "Boniface urged me, Este could not wait,"
 The chieftain stammered ; "let me die in peace —
 Forget me ! Was it I e'er craved increase
 Of rule ? Do you and Friedrich plot your worst
 Against the Father : as you found me first
 So leave me now. Forgive me ! Palma, sure,
 Is at Goito still. Retain that lure —
 Only be pacified ! "

The country rung
 With such a piece of news : on every tongue,
 How Ecelin's great servant, congeed off,
 Had done a long day's service, so, might doff
 The green and yellow, and recover breath
 At Mantua, whither, — since Retrude's death,
 (The girlish slip of a Sicilian bride
 From Otho's House, he carried to reside
 At Mantua till the Ferrarese should pile
 A structure worthy her imperial style,
 The gardens raise, the statues there enshrine,
 She never lived to see) — although his line
 Was ancient in her archives and she took
 A pride in him, that city, nor forsook
 Her child when he forsook himself and spent
 A prowess on Romano surely meant
 For his own growth — whither he ne'er resorts
 If wholly satisfied (to trust reports)
 With Ecelin. So, forward in a trice
 Were shows to greet him. "Take a friend's advice,"
 Quoth Naddo to Sordello, "nor be rash
 Because your rivals (nothing can abash
 Some folks) demur that we pronounced you best
 To sound the great man's welcome ; 't is a test,
 Remember ! Strojavacca looks asquint,
 The rough fat sloven ; and there's plenty hint
 Your pinions have received of late a shock —
 Out-soar them, cobswan of the silver flock !
 Sing well !" A signal wonder, song's no whit
 Facilitated.

Fast the minutes flit ;
 Another day, Sordello finds, will bring
 The soldier, and he cannot choose but sing ;
 So, a last shift, quits Mantua — slow, alone :
 Out of that aching brain, — a very stone,
 Song must be struck. What occupies that front ?
 Just how he was more awkward than his wont
 The night before, when Naddo, who had seen
 Taurello on his progress, praised the mien
 For dignity no crosses could affect —
 Such was a joy, and might not he detect
 A satisfaction if established joys
 Were proved imposture ? Poetry annoys
 Its utmost : wherefore fret ? Verses may come
 Or keep away ! And thus he wandered, dumb
 Till evening, when he paused, thoroughly spent,
 On a blind hill-top : down the gorge he went,
 Yielding himself up as to an embrace.
 The moon came out ; like features of a face
 A querulous fraternity of pines,
 Sad blackthorn clumps, leafless and grovelling vines
 Also came out, made gradually up
 The picture ; 't was Goito's mountain-cup
 And castle. He had dropped through one defile
 He never dared explore, the Chief erewhile
 Had vanished by. Back rushed the dream, enwrapped
 Him wholly. 'T was Apollo now they lapped,
 Those mountains, not a pettish minstrel meant
 To wear his soul away in discontent,

Brooding on fortune's malice. Heart and brain
Swelled; he expanded to himself again,
As some thin seedling spice-tree starved and frail,
Pushing between cat's head and ibis' tail
Crusted into the porphyry pavement smooth,
— Suffered remain just as it sprung, to soothe
The Soldan's pining daughter, never yet
Well in her chilly green-glazed minaret, —
When rooted up, the sunny day she died,
And flung into the common court beside
Its parent tree. Come home, Sordello! Soon
Was he low muttering, beneath the moon,
Of sorrow saved, of quiet evermore, —
Since from the purpose, he maintained before,
Only resulted wailing and hot tears.
Ah, the slim castle! dwindled of late years,
But more mysterious; gone to ruin — trails
Of vine through every loop-hole. Naught avails
The night as, torch in hand, he must explore
The maple chamber — did I say, its floor
Was made of intersecting cedar beams?
Worn now with gaps so large, there blew cold streams
Of air quite from the dungeon; lay your ear
Close and 't is like, one after one, you hear
In the blind darkness water drop. The nests
And nooks retained their long ranged vesture-chests
Empty and smelling of the iris-root
The Tuscan grated o'er them to recruit
Her wasted wits. Palma was gone that day,

Said the remaining women. Last, he lay
Beside the Carian group reserved and still.

 The Body, the Machine for Acting Will,
Had been at the commencement proved unfit ;
That for Reflecting, Demonstrating it,
Mankind — nō fitter : was the Will Itself
In fault ?

 His forehead pressed the moonlit shelf
Beside the youngest marble maid awhile ;
Then, raising it, he thought, with a long smile,
“ I shall be king again ! ” as he withdrew
The envied scarf ; into the font he threw
His crown.

 Next day, no poet ! “ Wherefore ? ” asked
Taurello, when the dance of Jongleurs, masked
As devils, ended ; “ don’t a song come next ? ”
The master of the pageant looked perplex
Till Naddo’s whisper came to his relief.
“ His Highness knew what poets were : in brief,
Had not the tetchy race prescriptive right
To peevishness, caprice ? or, call it spite,
One must receive their nature in its length
And breadth, expect the weakness with the strength ! ”
— So phrasing, till, his stock of phrases spent,
The easy-natured soldier smiled assent,
Settled his portly person, smoothed his chin,
And nodded that the bull-bait might begin.

BOOK THE THIRD.

NATURE MAY TRIUMPH THEREFORE ;

AND the font took them : let our laurels lie !
Braid moonfern now with mystic trifoly
Because once more Goito gets, once more,
Sordello to itself ! A dream is o'er,
And the suspended life begins anew ;
Quiet those throbbing temples, then, subdue
That cheek's distortion ! Nature's strict embrace,
Putting aside the Past, shall soon efface
Its print as well — factitious humors grown
Over the true — loves, hatreds not his own —
And turn him pure as some forgotten vest
Woven of painted byssus, silkiest
Tufting the Tyrrhene whelk's pearl-sheeted lip,
Left welter where a trireme let it slip
I' the sea, and vexed a satrap ; so the stain
O' the world forsakes Sordello, with its pain,
Its pleasure : how the tinct loosening escapes,
Cloud after cloud ! Mantua's familiar shapes
Die, fair and foul die, fading as they flit,
Men, women, and the pathos and the wit,
Wise speech and foolish, deeds to smile or sigh
For, good, bad, seemly or ignoble, die.
The last face glances through the eglantines,

The last voice murmurs 'twixt the blossomed vines
 Of Men, of that machine supplied by thought
 To compass self-perception with, he sought
 By forcing half himself — an insane pulse
 Of a god's blood, on clay it could convulse,
 Never transmute — on human sights and sounds,
 To watch the other half with ; irksome bounds
 It ebbs from to its source, a fountain sealed
 Forever. Better sure be unrevealed
 Than part-revealed : Sordello well or ill
 Is finished : then what further use of Will,
 A point in the prime idea not realized,
 An oversight? inordinately prized,
 No less, and pampered with enough of each
 Delight to prove the whole above its reach.
 " To need become all natures, yet retain
 The law of my own nature — to remain
 Myself, yet yearn . . . as if that chestnut, think,
 Should yearn for this first larch-bloom crisp and pink,
 Or those pale fragrant tears where zephyrs stanch
 March wounds along the fretted pine-tree branch !
 Will and the means to show will, great and small,
 Material, spiritual, — abjure them all
 Save any so distinct, they may be left
 To amuse, not tempt become ! and, thus bereft,
 Just as I first was fashioned would I be !
 Nor, Moon, is it Apollo now, but me
 Thou visitest to comfort and befriend !
 Swim thou into my heart, and there an end,

Since I possess thee !— nay, thus shut mine eyes
And know, quite know, by this heart's fall and rise,
When thou dost bury thee in clouds, and when
Out-standest : wherefore practise upon men
To make that plainer to myself ? ”

Slide here

Over a sweet and solitary year
Wasted : or simply notice change in him —
How eyes, bright with exploring once, grew dim
And satiate with receiving. Some distress
Was caused, too, by a sort of consciousness
Under the imbecility, — naught kept
That down ; he slept, but was aware he slept,
So, frustrated : as who brainsick made pact
Erst with the overhanging cataract
To deafen him, yet still distinguished slow
His own blood's measured clicking at his brow.

To finish. One declining Autumn day —
Few birds about the heaven chill and gray,
No wind that cared trouble the tacit woods —
He sauntered home complacently, their moods
According, his and Nature's. Every spark
Of Mantua life was trodden out ; so dark
The embers, that the Troubadour, who sung
Hundreds of songs, forgot, its trick his tongue,
Its craft his brain, how either brought to pass
Singing at all ; that faculty might class
With any of Apollo's now. † The year
Began to find its early promise sere

As well. Thus beauty vanishes ; thus stone
 Outlingers flesh : Nature's and his youth gone,
 They left the world to you, and wished you joy.
 When, stopping his benevolent employ,
 A presage shuddered through the welkin ; harsh
 The earth's remonstrance followed. 'T was the marsh
 Gone of a sudden. Mincio, in its place,
 Laughed, a broad water, in next morning's face,
 And, where the mists broke up immense and white
 I' the steady wind, burned like a spilth of light
 Out of the crashing of a myriad stars.
 And here was Nature, bound by the same bars
 Of fate with him !

“No ! youth once gone is gone :
 Deeds let escape are never to be done.
 Leaf-fall and grass-spring for the year ; for us —
 Oh forfeit I unalterably thus
 My chance ? nor two lives wait me, this to spend
 Learning save that ? Nature has time to mend
 Mistake, she knows occasion will recur —
 Landslip or seabreach, how affects it her
 With her magnificent resources ? — I
 Must perish once and perish utterly !
 Not any strollings now at even-close
 Down the field-path, Sordello ! by thorn-rows
 Alive with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire
 And dew, outlining the black cypress' spire
 She waits you at, Elys, who heard you first
 Woo her, the snow-month through, but ere she durst

Answer 't was April ! Linden-flower-time-long
Her eyes were on the ground ; 't is July, strong
Now ; and because white dust-clouds overwhelm
The woodside, here or by the village elm
That holds the moon, she meets you, somewhat pale,
But letting you lift up her coarse flax veil
And whisper (the damp little hand in yours)
Of love, heart's love, your heart's love that endures
Till death. Tush ! No mad mixing with the rout
Of haggard ribalds wandering about
The hot torchlit wine-scented island-house
Where Friedrich holds his wickedest carouse,
Parading, — to the gay Palermitans,
Soft Messinese, dusk Saracenic clans
Nuocera holds, — those tall grave dazzling Norse,
High-cheeked, lank-haired, toothed whiter than the morse,
Queens of the caves of jet stalactites,
He sent his barks to fetch through icy seas,
The blind night seas without a saving star,
And here in snowy birdskin robes they are,
Sordello ! — here, mollitious alcoves gilt
Superb as Byzant domes that devils built !
— Ah, Byzant, there again ! no chance to go
Ever like august pleasant Dandolo,
Worshipping hearts about him for a wall,
Conducted, blind eyes, hundred years and all,
Through vanquished Byzant where friends note for him
What pillar, marble massive, sardius slim,
'T were fittest he transport to Venice' Square —

Flattered and promised life to touch them there
 Soon, by his fervid sons of senators!
 No more lives, deaths, loves, hatreds, peaces, wars —
 Ah, fragments of a whole ordained to be!
 Points in the life I waited! what are ye
 But roundels of a ladder which appeared
 Awhile the very platform it was reared
 To lift me on? — that happiness I find
 Proofs of my faith in, even in the blind
 Instinct which bade forego you all unless
 Ye led me past yourselves. Ay, happiness
 Awaited me; the way life should be used
 Was to acquire, and deeds like you conducted
 To teach it by a self-revelment, deemed
 The very use, so long! Whatever seemed
 Progress to that, was pleasure; aught that stayed
 My reaching it — no pleasure. I have laid
 The ladder down; I climb not; still, aloft
 The platform stretches! Bliss strong and soft,
 I dared not entertain, elude me; yet
 Never of what they promised could I get
 A glimpse till now! The common sort, the crowd
 Exist, perceive; with Being are endowed,
 However slight, distinct from what they See,
 However bounded: Happiness must be,
 To feed the first by gleanings from the last,
 Attain its qualities, and slow or fast
 Become what they behold; such peace-in-strife
 By transmutation, is the Use of Life,
 The Alien turning Native to the soul

Or body — which instructs me ; I am whole
 There and demand a Palma ; had the world
 Been from my soul to a like distance hurled,
 'T were Happiness to make it one with me —
 Whereas I must, ere I begin to Be,
 Include a world, in flesh, I comprehend
 In spirit now ; and this done, what 's to blend
 With ? Naught is Alien in the world — my '

Owns all already ; yet can turn it still
 Less Native, since my Means to correspond
 With Will are so unworthy, 't was my bond
 To tread the very joys that tantalize
 Most now, into a grave, never to rise.
 I die then ! Will the rest agree to die ?
 Next Age or no ? Shall its Sordello try
 Clew after clew, and catch at last the clew
 I miss ? — that 's underneath my finger too,
 Twice, thrice a day, perhaps, — some yearning traced
 Deeper, some petty consequence embraced
 Closer ! Why fled I Mantua, then ? — complained
 So much my Will was fettered, yet remained
 Content within a tether half the range
 I could assign it ? — able to exchange
 My ignorance (I felt) for knowledge, and
 Idle because I could thus understand —
 Could e'en have penetrated to its core
 Our mortal mystery, and yet forbore,
 Preferred elaborating in the dark
 My casual stuff, by any wretched spark

Born of my predecessors, though one stroke
 Of mine had brought the flame forth ! Mantua's yoke,
 My minstrel's-trade, was to behold mankind, —
 My own concernment — just to bring my mind
 Behold, just extricate, for my acquist,
 Each object suffered stifle in the mist
 Which hazard, use and blindness could impose
 In their relation to myself."

He rose.

The level wind carried above the firs
 Clouds, the irrevocable travellers,
 Onward.

"Pushed thus into a drowsy copse,
 Arms twine about my neck, each eyelid drops
 Under a humid finger ; while there fleets,
 Outside the screen, a pageant time repeats
 Never again ! To be deposed — immured
 Clandestinely — still petted, still assured
 To govern were fatiguing work — the Sight
 Fleeting meanwhile ! 'T is noontide : wreak ere night
 Somehow my will upon it, rather ! Slake
 This thirst somehow, the poorest impress take
 That serves ! A blasted bud displays you, torn,
 Faint rudiments of the full flower unborn ;
 But who divines what glory coats o'erclasp
 Of the bulb dormant in the mummy's grasp
 Taurello sent " . . .

" Taurello ? Palma sent
 Your Trouvere," (Naddo interposing leant

Over the lost bard's shoulder) — "and, believe,
 You cannot more reluctantly receive
 Than I pronounce her message: we depart
 Together. What avail a poet's heart
 Verona's pomps and gauds? five blades of grass
 Suffice him. News? Why, where your marish was,
 On its mud-banks smoke fast rises after smoke
 In the valley, like a spout of hell new-broke.
 O, the world's tidings! small your thanks, I guess,
 For them. The father of our Patroness,
 Has played Taurello an astounding trick,
 Parts between Ecelin and Alberic
 His wealth and goes into a convent: both
 Wed Guelfs: the Count and Palma plighted troth
 A week since at Verona: and they want
 You doubtless to contrive the marriage-chant
 Ere Richard storms Ferrara." Here was told
 The tale from the beginning — how, made bold
 By Salinguerra's absence, Guelfs had burned
 And pillaged till he unawares returned
 To take revenge: how Azzo and his friend
 Were doing their endeavor, how the end
 Of the siege was nigh, and how the Count, released
 From further care, would with his marriage-feast
 Inaugurate a new and better rule,
 Absorbing thus Romano.

" Shall I school
 My master," added Naddo, "and suggest
 How you may clothe in a poetic vest

These doings, at Verona? Your response
 To Palma! Wherefore jest? 'Depart at once?'
 A good resolve! In truth, I hardly hoped
 So prompt an acquiescence. Have you groped
 Out wisdom in the wilds here? — Thoughts may be
 Over-poetical for poetry.
 Pearl-white, you poets liken Palma's neck;
 And yet what spoils an orient like some speck
 Of genuine white, turning its own white gray?
 You take me? Curse the cicale!"

One more day.

One eve — appears Verona! Many a group,
 (You mind) instructed of the osprey's swoop
 On lynx and ounce, was gathering — Christendom
 Sure to receive, whate'er the end was, from
 The evening's purpose cheer or detriment,
 Since Friedrich only waited some event
 Like this, of Ghibellins establishing
 Themselves within Ferrara, ere, as King
 Of Lombardy, he'd glad descend there, wage
 Old warfare with the Pontiff, disengage
 His barons from the burghers, and restore
 The rule of Charlemagne, broken of yore
 By Hildebrand.

In the palace, each by each,
 Sordello sat and Palma: little speech
 At first in that dim closet, face with face
 (Despite the tumult in the market-place)
 Exchanging quick low laughs: now would rush

Word upon word to meet a sudden flush,
 A look left off, a shifting lips' surmise —
 But for the most part their two histories
 Ran best thro' the locked fingers and linked arms.
 And so the night flew on with its alarms
 Till in burst one of Palma's retinue ;
 " Now, Lady ! " gasped he. Then arose the two
 And leaned into Verona's air, dead-still.
 A balcony lay black beneath until
 Out, 'mid a gush of torchfire, gray-haired men
 Came on it and harangued the people : then
 Sea-like that people surging to and fro
 Shouted, " Hale forth the Carroch — trumpets, ho,
 A flourish ! run it in the ancient grooves —
 Back from the bell ! Hammer ! that whom behooves
 May hear the League is up ! Peal ! learn who list,
 Verona means not be the first break tryst
 To-morrow with the League ! "

Enough. Now turn —

Over the eastern cypresses : discern —
 Is any beacon set a-glimmer ?

Rang

The air with shouts that overpowered the clang
 Of the incessant carroch, even : " Haste —
 The Candle's at the gateway ! ere it waste,
 Each soldier stand beside it, armed to march
 With Tiso Sampier through the eastern arch ! "
 Ferrara's succored, Palma !

Once again

They sat together ; some strange thing in train
 To say, so difficult was Palma's place
 In taking, with a coy fastidious grace
 Like the bird's flutter, ere it fix and feed.
 But when she felt she held her friend indeed
 Safe, she threw back her curls, began implant
 Her lessons ; telling of another want
 Goito's quiet nourished than his own ;
 Palma — to serve, as him — be served, alone
 Importing ; Agnes' milk so neutralized
 The blood of Ecelin. Nor be surprised
 If, while Sordello fain had captive led
 Nature, in dream was Palma wholly subjected
 To some out-soul, which dawned not though she pined
 Delaying till its advent, heart and mind,
 Their life. " How dared I let expand the force
 Within me, till some out-soul, whose resource
 It grew for, should direct it ? Every law
 Of life, its every fitness, every flaw,
 Must One determine whose corporeal shape
 Would be no other than the prime escape
 And revelation to me of a Will
 Orb-like o'ershrouded and inscrutable
 Above, save at the point which, I should know,
 Shone that myself, my powers, might overflow
 So far, so much ; as now it signified
 Which earthly shape it henceforth chose my guide,
 Whose mortal lip selected to declare
 Its oracles, what fleshly garb would wear ;

— The first of intimations, whom to love ;
The next, how love him. Seemed that orb, above
The castle-covert and the mountain-close,
Slow in appearing, — if beneath it rose
Cravings, aversions, — did our green precinct
Take pride in me, at unawares distinct
With this or that endowment, — how, repress
At once, such jetting power shrunk to the rest !
Was I to have a chance touch spoil me, leave
My spirit thence unfitted to receive
The consummating spell ? — that spell so near
Moreover ! ‘ Waits he not the waking year ?
His almond-blossoms must be honey-ripe
By this ; to welcome him, fresh runnels stripe
The thawed ravines ; because of him, the wind
Walks like a herald. I shall surely find
Him now ! ’

And chief, that earnest April morn
Of Richard’s Love-court, was it time, so worn
And white my cheek, so idly my blood beat,
Sitting that morn beside the Lady’s feet
And saying as she prompted ; till outburst
One face from all the faces — not then first
I knew it ; where in maple chamber glooms,
Crowned with what sanguine-heart pomegranate blooms
Advanced it ever ? Men’s acknowledgment
Sanctioned my own : ’t was taken, Palma’s bent, —
Sordello, accepted.

And the Tuscan dumb

Sat scheming, scheming. Ecelin would come
 Gaunt, scared, 'Cesano baffles me,' he'd say :
 'Better I fought it out, my father's way !
 Strangle Ferrara in its drowning flats,
 And you and your Taurello yonder — what's
 Romano's business there?' An hour's concern
 To cure the froward Chief! — induced return
 Much heartened from those overmeaning eyes,
 Wound up to persevere, — his enterprise
 Marked out anew, its exigent of wit
 Apportioned, — she at liberty to sit
 And scheme against the next emergence, I —
 To covet her Taurello-sprite, made fly
 Or fold the wing — to con your horoscope
 For leave command those steely shafts shoot ope,
 Or straight assuage their blinding eagerness
 To blank smooth snow. What semblance of success
 To any of my plans for making you
 Mine and Romano's? Break the first wall through,
 Tread o'er the ruins of the Chief, supplant
 His sons beside, still, vainest were the vaunt :
 There, Salinguerra would obstruct me sheer,
 And the insuperable Tuscan, here,
 Stayed me ! But one wild eve that Lady died
 In her lone chamber : only I beside :
 Taurello far at Naples, and my sire
 At Padua, Ecelin away in ire
 With Alberic. She held me thus — a clutch
 To make our spirits as our bodies touch —

And so began flinging the Past up, heaps
 Of uncouth treasure from their sunless sleeps
 Within her soul ; deeds rose along with dreams,
 Fragments of many miserable schemes,
 Secrets, more secrets, then — no, not the last —
 'Mongst others, like a casual trick o' the Past,
 How . . . ay, she told me, gathering up her face
 — All left of it, into one arch-grimace
 To die with . . .

Friend, 't is gone ! but not the fear
 Of that fell laughing, heard as now I hear.
 Nor faltered voice, nor seemed her heart grow weak,
 When i' the midst abrupt she ceased to speak
 — Dead, as to serve a purpose, mark ! — for in
 Rushed o' the very instant Ecelin
 (How summoned, who divines ?) — looking as if
 He understood why Adelaide lay stiff
 Already in my arms ; for, ' Girl, how must
 I manage Este in the matter thrust
 Upon me, how unravel your bad coil ? —
 Since ' (he declared) ' 't is on your brow — a soil
 Like hers, there ! ' then in the same breath, ' he lacked
 No counsel after all, had signed no pact
 With devils, nor was treason here or there,
 Goito or Vicenza, his affair :
 He buried it in Adelaide's deep grave,
 Would begin life afresh, now, — would not slave
 For any Friedrich's nor Taurello's sake !
 What bootied him to meddle or to make

In Lombardy?' And afterward I knew
 The meaning of his promise to undo
 All she had done — why marriages were made,
 New friendships entered on, old followers paid
 With curses for their pains, — new friends' amaze
 At height, when, passing out by Gate St. Blaise,
 He stopped short in Vicenza, bent his head
 Over a friar's neck, — 'had vowed,' he said,
 'Long since, nigh thirty years, because his wife
 And child were saved there, to bestow his life
 On God, his gettings on the Church.'

Exiled

Within Goito, still one dream beguiled
 My days and nights; 't was found, the orb I sought
 To serve, those glimpses came of Fomalhaut,
 No other: but how serve it? — authorize
 You and Romano mingle destinies?
 And straight Romano's angel stood beside
 Me who had else been Boniface's bride,
 For Salinguerra 't was, with neck low bent,
 And voice lightened to music, (as he meant
 To learn not teach me,) who withdrew the pall
 From the dead Past and straight revived it all,
 Making me see how first Romano waxed,
 Wherefore he waned now, why, if I relaxed
 My grasp (even I!) would drop a thing effete,
 Frayed by itself, unequal to complete
 Its course, and counting every step astray
 A gain so much. Romano, every way

Stable, a Lombard House now — why start back
 Into the very outset of its track?
 This patching-principle which late allied
 Our House with other Houses — what beside
 Concerned the apparition, the first Knight
 Who followed Conrad hither in such plight
 His utmost wealth was summed in his one steed?
 For Ecelo, that prowler, was decreed
 A task, in the beginning hazardous
 To him as ever task can be to us;
 But did the weather-beaten thief despair
 When first our crystal cincture of warm air, —
 That binds the Trevisan, — as its spice-belt
 (Crusaders say) the tract where Jesus dwelt, —
 Furtive he pierced, and Este was to face —
 Despaired Saponian strength of Lombard grace?
 Tried he at making surer aught made sure,
 Maturing what already was mature?
 No; his heart prompted Ecelo, ‘Confront
 Este, inspect yourself. What’s nature? Wont.
 Discard three-parts your nature, and adopt
 The rest as an advantage!’ Old strength propped
 The man who first grew Podestà among
 The Vincentines, no less than, while there sprung
 His palace up in Padua like a threat,
 Their noblest spied a grace, unnoticed yet
 In Conrad’s crew. Thus far the object gained,
 Romano was established — has remained —
 For are you not Italian, truly peers

With Este ? ‘Azzo’ better soothes our ears
 Than ‘Alberic?’ or is this lion’s-crine
 From over-mounts’ (this yellow hair of mine)
 ‘So weak a graft on Agnes Este’s stock?’
 (Thus went he on with something of a mock)
 ‘Wherefore recoil, then, from the very fate
 Conceded you, refuse to imitate
 Your model farther? Este long since left
 Being mere Este : as a blade its heft,
 Este required the Pope to further him :
 And you, the Kaiser — whom your father’s whim
 Foregoes or, better, never shall forego
 If Palma dare pursue what Ecelo
 Commenced, but Ecelin desists from : just
 As Adelaide of Susa could intrust
 Her donative, — her Piedmont given the Pope,
 Her Alpine-pass for him to shut or ope
 ’Twixt France and Italy, — to the superb
 Matilda’s perfecting, — so, lest aught curb
 Our Adelaide’s great counter-project for
 Giving her Trentine to the Emperor
 With passage here from Germany, — shall you
 Take it, — my slender plodding talent, too!’
 — Urged me Taurello with his half-smile.

He

As Patron of the scattered family
 Conveyed me to his Mantua, kept in bruit
 Azzo’s alliances and Richard’s suit
 Until, the Kaiser excommunicate,

'Nothing remains,' Taurello said, 'but wait
 Some rash procedure: Palma was the link,
 As Agnes' child, between us, and they shrink
 From losing Palma: judge if we advance,
 Your father's method, your inheritance!'
 That day I was betrothed to Boniface
 At Padua by Taurello's self, took place
 The outrage of the Ferrarese: again,
 That day I sought Verona with the train
 Agreed for, — by Taurello's policy
 Convicting Richard of the fault, since we
 Were present to annul or to confirm, —
 Richard, whose patience had outstayed its term,
 Quitted Verona for the siege.

And now

What glory may engird Sordello's brow
 Through this? A month since at Oliero slunk
 All that was Ecelin into a monk;
 But how could Salinguerra so forget
 His liege of thirty years as grudge even yet
 One effort to recover him? He sent
 Forthwith the tidings of this last event
 To Ecelin — declared that he, despite
 The recent folly, recognized his right
 To order Salinguerra: 'Should he wring
 Its uttermost advantage out, or fling
 This chance away? Or were his sons now Head
 Of the House?' Through me Taurello's missive sped;
 My father's answer will by me return.

Behold! 'For him,' he writes, 'no more concern
 With strife than, for his children, with fresh plots
 Of Friedrich. Old engagements out he blots
 For aye: Taurello shall no more subserve,
 Nor Ecelin impose.' Lest this unnerve
 Taurello at this juncture, slack his grip
 Of Richard, suffer the occasion slip, —
 I, in his sons' default (who, mating with
 Este, forsake Romano as the frith
 Its mainsea for the firmland, sea makes head
 Against) I stand, Romano, — in their stead
 Assume the station they desert, and give
 Still, as the Kaiser's representative,
 Taurello license he demands. Midnight —
 Morning — by noon to-morrow, making light
 Of the League's issue, we, in some gay weed
 Like yours, disguised together, may precede
 The arbitrators to Ferrara: reach
 Him, let Taurello's noble accents teach
 The rest! then say if I have misconceived
 Your destiny, too readily believed
 The Kaiser's cause your own!"

And Palma's fled.

Though no affirmative disturbs the head,
 A dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er,
 Like the alighted planet Pollux wore,
 Until, morn breaking, he resolves to be
 Gate-vein of this heart's blood of Lombardy,
 Soul of this body — to wield this aggregate

Of souls and bodies, and so conquer fate
 Though he should live — a centre of disgust
 Even — apart, core of the outward crust
 He vivified, assimilated. Thus
 I bring Sordello to the rapturous
 Exclaim at the crowd's cry, because one round
 Of life was quite accomplished; and he found
 Not only that a soul, whate'er its might,
 Is insufficient to its own delight,
 Both in corporeal organs and in skill
 By means of such to body forth its Will —
 And, after, insufficient to apprise
 Men of that Will, oblige them recognize
 The Hid by the Revealed — but that, the last
 Nor lightest of the struggles overpast,
 His Will, bade abdicate, which would not void
 The throne, might sit there, suffer be enjoyed
 Mankind, a varied and divine array
 Incapable of homage, the first way,
 Nor fit to render incidentally
 Tribute connived at, taken by the by,
 In joys. If thus with warrant to rescind
 The ignominious exile of mankind —
 Whose proper service, ascertained intact
 As yet, (to be by him themselves made act,
 Not watch Sordello acting each of them)
 Was to secure — if the true diadem
 Seemed imminent while our Sordello drank
 The wisdom of that golden Palma, — thank

Verona's Lady in her Citadel
Founded by Gaulish Brennus, legends tell :
And truly when she left him, the sun reared
A head like the first clamberer's that peered
A-top the Capitol, his face on flame
With triumph, triumphing till Manlius came.
Nor slight too much my rhymes — that spring, dispread,
Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead
Like an escape of angels ! Rather say,
My transcendental platan ! mounting gay
(An archimage so courts a novice-queen)
With tremulous silvered trunk, whence branches sheen
Laugh out, thick-foliaged next, a-shiver soon
With colored buds, then glowing like the moon
One mild flame, — last a pause, a burst, and all
Her ivory limbs are smothered by a fall,
Bloom-flinders and fruit-sparkles and leaf-dust,
Ending the weird work prosecuted just
For her amusement ; he decrepit, stark,
Dozes ; her uncontrolled delight may mark
Apart —

Yet not so, surely never so !
Only, as good my soul were suffered go
O'er the lagune : forth fare thee, put aside
Entrance thy synod, as a god may glide
Out of the world he fills, and leave it mute
For myriad ages as we men compute,
Returning into it without a break
O' the consciousness ! They sleep, and I awake
O'er the lagune.

Sordello said once, "Note,
 In just such songs as Eglamor (say) wrote
 With heart and soul and strength, for he believed
 Himself achieving all to be achieved
 By singer — in such songs you find alone
 Completeness, judge the song and singer one,
 And either's purpose answered, his in it
 Or its in him: while from true works (to wit
 Sordello's dream-performances that will
 Be never more than dreamed) escapes there still
 Some proof, the singer's proper life was 'neath
 The life his song exhibits, this a sheath
 To that; a passion and a knowledge far
 Transcending these, majestic as they are,
 Smouldered; his lay was but an episode
 In the bard's life: which evidence you owed
 To some slight weariness, some looking-off
 Or start-away. The childish skit or scoff
 In "Charlemagne," (his poem, dreamed divine
 In every point except one silly line
 About the restiff daughters!) — what may lurk
 In that? 'My life commenced before that work,
 (Thus I interpret the significance
 Of the bard's start aside and look askance)
 'My life continues after: on I fare
 With no more stopping, possibly, no care
 To note the undercurrent, the why and how,
 Where, when, of the deeper life, as thus just now.
 But, silent, shall I cease to live? Alas

For you ! who sigh, ‘ When shall it come to pass
 We read that story ? How will he compress
 The future gains, his life’s true business,
 Into the better lay which — that one flout,
 Howe’er inopportune it be, lets out —
 Engrosses him already, though professed
 To meditate with us eternal rest,
 And partnership in all his life has found ?
 ’T is but a sailor’s promise, weather-bound :
 ‘ Strike sail, slip cable, here the bark be moored
 For once, the awning stretched, the poles assured !
 Noontide above ; except the wave’s crisp dash,
 Or buzz of colibri, or tortoise’ splash,
 The margin’s silent : out with every spoil
 Made in our tracking, coil by mighty coil,
 This serpent of a river to his head
 I’ the midst ! Admire each treasure, as we spread
 The bank, to help us tell our history
 Aright : give ear, endeavor to descry
 The groves of giant rushes, how they grew
 Like demons’ endlong tresses we sailed through,
 What mountains yawned, forests to give us vent
 Opened, each doleful side, yet on we went
 Till . . . may that beetle (shake your cap) attest
 The springing of a land-wind from the West !’
 — ‘ Wherefore ? Ah yes, you frolic it to-day !
 To-morrow, and the pageant’s moved away
 Down to the poorest tent-pole : we and you
 Part company : no other may pursue

Eastward your voyage, be informed what fate
Intends, if triumph or decline await
The tempter of the everlasting steppe.'

I muse this on a ruined palace-step
At Venice: why should I break off, nor sit
Longer upon my step, exhaust the fit
England gave birth to? Who's adorable
Enough reclaim a —— no Sordello's Will
Alack! — be queen to me? That Bassanese
Busied among her smoking fruit-boats? These
Perhaps from our delicious Asolo
Who twinkle, pigeons o'er the portico
Not prettier, bind June lilies into sheaves
To deck the bridge-side chapel, dropping leaves
Soiled by their own loose gold-meal? Ah, beneath
The cool arch stoops she, brownest-cheek! Her wreath
Endures a month — a half-month — if I make
A queen of her, continue for her sake
Sordello's story? Nay, that Paduan girl
Splashes with barer legs where a live whirl
In the dead black Giudecca proves sea-weed
Drifting has sucked down three, four, all indeed
Save one pale-red striped, pale-blue turbaned post
For gondolas.

You sad dishevelled ghost
That pluck at me and point, are you advised
I breathe? Let stay those girls (e'en her disguised
— Jewels in the locks that love no crownlet like
Their native field-buds and the green wheat spike,

So fair! — who left this end of June's turmoil,
 Shook off, as might a lily its gold soil,
 Pomp, save a foolish gem or two, and free
 In dream, came join the peasants o'er the sea.)
 Look they too happy, too tricked out? Confess
 There is such niggard stock of happiness
 To share, that, do one's uttermost, dear wretch,
 One labors ineffectually to stretch
 It o'er you so that mother and children, both
 May equitably flaunt the sumpter-cloth!
 Divide the robe yet farther: be content
 With seeing just a score pre-eminent
 Through shreds of it, acknowledged happy wights,
 Engrossing what should furnish all, by rights —
 For, these in evidence, you clearer claim
 A like garb for the rest, — grace all, the same
 As these my peasants. I ask youth and strength
 And health for each of you, not more — at length
 Grown wise, who asked at home that the whole race
 Might add the spirit's to the body's grace,
 And all be dizen'd out as chiefs and bards.
 But in this magic weather one discards
 Much old requirement — Venice seems a type
 Of Life, — 'twixt blue and blue extends, a stripe,
 As Life, the somewhat, hangs 'twixt naught and naught
 'T is Venice, and 't is Life — as good you sought
 To spare me the Piazza's slippery stone,
 Or keep me to the unchoked canals alone,
 As hinder Life the evil with the good

Which make up Living, rightly understood.
Only, do finish something! Peasants or queens,
Take them, made happy by whatever means,
Parade them for the common credit, vouch
That a luckless residue, we send to crouch
In corners out of sight, was just as framed
For happiness, its portion might have claimed
As well, and so, obtaining it, had stalked .
Fastuous as any! — such my project, balked
Already; I hardly venture to adjust
The first rags, when you find me. To mistrust
Me! — nor unreasonably. You, no doubt,
Have the true knack of tiring suitors out
With those thin lips on tremble, lashless eyes
Inveterately tear-shot — there, be wise
Mistress of mine, there, there, as if I meant
You insult! Shall your friend (not slave) be shent
For speaking home? Beside, care-bit, erased,
Broken-up beauties ever took my taste
Supremely, and I love you more, far more
Than her I looked should foot Life's temple-floor.
Years ago, leagues at distance, when and where
A whisper came, "Let others seek! — thy care
Is found, thy life's provision; if thy race
Should be thy mistress, and into one face
The many faces crowd?" Ah, had I, judge,
Or no, your secret? Rough apparel — grudge
All ornaments save tag or tassel worn
To hint we are not thoroughly forlorn —

Slouch bonnet, unloop mantle, careless go
 Alone (that's saddest but it must be so)
 Through Venice, sing now and now glance aside,
 Aught desultory or undignified, —
 Then, ravishingest lady, will you pass
 Or not each formidable group, the mass
 Before the Basilic (that feast gone by,
 God's great day of the Corpus Domini)
 And, wistfully foregoing proper men,
 Come timid up to me for alms? And then
 The luxury to hesitate, feign do
 Some unexampled grace! — when, whom but you
 Dare I bestow your own upon? And here
 Further before you say, it is to sneer
 I call you ravishing; for I regret
 Little that she, whose early foot was set
 Forth as she'd plant it on a pedestal,
 Now, i' the silent city, seems to fall
 Toward me — no wreath, only a lip's unrest
 To quiet, surcharged eyelids to be pressed
 Dry of their tears upon my bosom. Strange
 Such sad chance should produce in thee such change,
 My love! warped souls and bodies! yet God spoke
 Of right-hand, foot and eye — selects our yoke,
 Sordello, as your poetship may find!
 So, sleep upon my shoulder, child, nor mind
 Their foolish talk; we'll manage reinstate
 Your old worth; ask moreover, when they prate
 Of evil men past hope, "don't each contrive,

Despite the evil you abuse, to live? —
 Keeping, each losel, through a maze of lies,
 His own conceit of truth? to which he hies
 By obscure windings, tortuous, if you will,
 But to himself not inaccessible ;
 He sees truth, and his lies are for the crowd
 Who cannot see ; some fancied right allowed
 His vilest wrong, empowered the fellow clutch
 One pleasure from a multitude of such
 Denied him." Then assert, " all men appear
 To think all better than themselves, by here
 Trusting a crowd they wrong ; but really," say,
 " All men think all men stupider than they,
 Since, save themselves, no other comprehends
 The complicated scheme to make amends
 — Evil, the scheme by which, thro' Ignorance,
 Good labors to exist." A slight advance, —
 Merely to find the sickness you die through,
 And naught beside ! but if one can't eschew
 One's portion in the common lot, at least
 One can avoid an ignorance increased
 Tenfold by dealing out hint after hint
 How naught were like dispensing without stint
 The water of life — so easy to dispense
 Beside, when one has probed the centre whence
 Commotion's born — could tell you of it all !
 " — Meantime, just meditate my madrigal
 O' the mugwort that conceals a dew-drop safe !"
 What, dullard ? we and you in smothery chafe,

Babes, baldheads, stumbled thus far into Zin
 The Horrid, getting neither out nor in,
 A hungry sun above us, sands that bung
 Our throats, — each dromedary lolls a tongue,
 Each camel churns a sick and frothy chap,
 And you, 'twixt tales of Potiphar's mishap,
 And sonnets on the earliest ass that spoke,
 — Remark, you wonder any one needs choke
 With founts about! Potsherd him, Gibeonites!
 While awkwardly enough your Moses smites
 The rock, though he forego his Promised Land,
 Thereby, have Satan claim his carcass, and
 Figure as Metaphysic Poet . . . ah
 Mark ye the dim first oozings? Meribah!
 Then, quaffing at the fount my courage gained,
 Recall — not that I prompt ye — who explained . . .
 "Presumptuous!" interrupts one. You, not I
 'T is, brother, marvel at and magnify
 Such office: "office," quotha? can we get
 To the beginning of the office yet?
 What do we here? simply experiment
 Each on the other's power and its intent
 When elsewhere tasked, — if this of mine were trucked
 For yours to either's good, — we watch construct,
 In short, an engine: with a finished one,
 What it can do, is all, — naught, how 't is done.
 But this of ours yet in probation, dusk
 A kernel of strange wheelwork through its husk
 Grows into shape by quarters and by halves;

Remark this tooth's spring, wonder what that valve's
 Fall bodes, presume each faculty's device,
 Make out each other more or less precise —
 The scope of the whole engine's to be proved;
 We die: which means to say, the whole's removed,
 Dismounted wheel by wheel, this complex gin, —
 To be set up anew elsewhere, begin
 A task indeed, but with a clearer clime
 Than the murk lodgment of our building-time.
 And then, I grant you, it behooves forget
 How 't is done — all that must amuse us yet
 So long: and, while you turn upon your heel,
 Pray that I be not busy slitting steel
 Or shredding brass, camped on some virgin shore
 Under a cluster of fresh stars, before
 I name a tithe o' the wheels I trust to do!
 So occupied, then, are we: hitherto,
 At present, and a weary while to come,
 The office of ourselves, — nor blind nor dumb,
 And seeing somewhat of man's state, — has been,
 For the worst of us, to say they so have seen;
 For the better, what it was they saw; the best
 Impart the gift of seeing to the rest:
 "So that I glance," says such an one, "around,
 And there's no face but I can read profound
 Disclosures in; this stands for hope, that — fear,
 And for a speech, a deed in proof, look here!
 'Stoop, else the strings of blossom, where the nuts
 O'erarch, will blind thee! said I not? she shuts

Both eyes this time, so close the hazels meet !
 Thus, prisoned in the Piombi, I repeat
 Events one rove occasioned, o'er and o'er,
 Putting 'twixt me and madness evermore
 Thy sweet shape, Zanze ! therefore stoop !'

‘ That 's truth ! ’

(Adjudge you) ‘ the incarcerated youth
 Would say that ! ’

‘ Youth ? Plara the bard ? Set down
 That Plara spent his youth in a grim town
 Whose cramped ill-featured streets huddled about
 The minster for protection, never out
 Of its black belfry's shade and its bells' roar.
 The brighter shone the suburb, — all the more
 Ugly and absolute that shade's reproof
 Of any chance escape of joy, — some roof,
 Taller than they, allowed the rest detect
 Before the sole permitted laugh (suspect
 Who could, 't was meant for laughter, that ploughed cheek's
 Repulsive gleam !) when the sun stopped both peaks
 Of the cleft belfry like a fiery wedge,
 Then sunk, a hugh flame on its socket's edge,
 With leavings on the gray glass oriel-pane
 Ghastly some minutes more. No fear of rain —
 The minster minded that ! in heaps the dust
 Lay everywhere. This town, the minster's trust,
 Held Plara ; who, its denizen, bade hail
 In twice twelve sonnets, Tempe's dewy vale.'
 ‘ Exact the town, the minster and the street ! ’

‘As all mirth triumphs, sadness means defeat :
 Lust triumphs and is gay, Love’s triumphed o’er
 And sad : but Lucio’s sad. I said before,
 Love’s sad, not Lucio ; one who loves may be
 As gay his love has leave to hope, as he
 Downcast that lusts’ desire escapes the springe :
 ’T is of the mood itself I speak, what tinge
 Determines it, else colorless, — or mirth,
 Or melancholy, as from heaven or earth.’

‘Ay, that’s the variation’s gist!’ Indeed?
 Thus far advanced in safety then, proceed !
 And having seen too what I saw, be bold
 And next encounter what I do behold
 (That’s sure) but bid you take on trust ! Attack
 The use and purpose of such sights ? Alack,
 Not so unwisely does the crowd dispense
 On Salinguerras praise in preference
 To the Sordellos : men of action, these !
 Who, seeing just as little as you please,
 Yet turn that little to account, — engage
 With, do not gaze at, — carry on, a stage,
 The work o’ the world, not merely make report
 The work existed ere their day ! In short,
 When at some future no-time a brave band
 Sees, using what it sees, then shake my hand
 In heaven, my brother ! Meanwhile where’s the hurt
 Of keeping the Makers-see on the alert,
 At whose defection mortals stare aghast
 As though heaven’s bounteous windows were slammed fast

Incontinent? whereas all you, beneath,
 Should scowl at, curse them, bruise lips, break their teeth
 Who ply the pullies, for neglecting you :
 And therefore have I moulded, made anew
 A Man, and give him to be turned and tried,
 Be angry with or pleased at. On your side,
 Have ye times, places, actors of your own ?
 Try them upon Sordello when full-grown,
 And then — ah then ! If Hercules first parched
 His foot in Egypt only to be marched
 A sacrifice for Jove with pomp to suit,
 What chance have I ? The demigod was mute
 Till, at the altar, where time out of mind
 Such guests became oblations, chaplets twined
 His forehead long enough, and he began
 Slaying the slayers, nor escaped a man.
 Take not affront, my gentle audience ! whom
 No Hercules shall make his hecatomb,
 Believe, nor from his brows your chaplet rend —
 That's your kind suffrage, yours, my patron-friend,
 Whose great verse blares unintermittent on
 Like your own trumpeter at Marathon, —
 You who, Plateas and Salamis being scant,
 Put up with Ætna for a stimulant —
 And did well, I acknowledged, as he loomed
 Over the midland sea last month, presumed
 Long, lay demolished in the blazing West
 At eve, while towards him tilting cloudlets prest
 Like Persian ships at Salamis. Friend, wear

A crest proud as desert while I declare
 Had I a flawless ruby fit to wring
 Tears of its color from that painted king
 Who lost it, I would, for that smile which went
 To my heart, fling it in the sea, content,
 Wearing your verse in place, an amulet
 Sovereign against all passion, wear and fret!
 My English Eyebright, if you are not glad
 That, as I stopped my task awhile, the sad
 Disheveled form, wherein I put mankind
 To come at times and keep my pact in mind,
 Renewed me, — hear no crickets in the hedge,
 Nor let a glowworm spot the river's edge
 At home, and may the summer showers gush
 Without a warning from the missel thrush!
 So, to our business, now — the fate of such
 As find our common nature — overmuch
 Despised because restricted and unfit
 To bear the burden they impose on it —
 Cling when they would discard it; craving strength
 To leap from the allotted world, at length
 They do leap, — flounder on without a term,
 Each a god's germ, doomed to remain a germ
 In unexpanded infancy, unless . . .
 But that's the story — dull enough, confess!
 There might be fitter subjects to allure;
 Still, neither misconceive my portraiture
 Nor undervalue its adornments quaint:
 What seems a fiend perchance may prove a saint.

Ponder a story ancient pens transmit,
 Then say if you condemn me or acquit.
 John the Beloved, banished Antioch
 For Patmos, bade collectively his flock
 Farewell, but set apart the closing eve
 To comfort those his exile most would grieve,
 He knew: a touching spectacle, that house
 In motion to receive him! Xanthus' spouse
 You missed, made panther's meat a month since; but
 Xanthus himself (his nephew 't was, they shut
 'Twixt boards and sawed asunder) Polycarp,
 Soft Charicle, next year no wheel could warp
 To swear by Cæsar's fortune, with the rest
 Were ranged; thro' whom the gray disciple prest,
 Busily blessing right and left, just stopt
 To pat one infant's curls, the hangman cropt
 Soon after, reached the portal — on its hinge
 The door turns and he enters — what quick twinge
 Ruins the smiling mouth, those wide eyes fix
 Whereon, why like some spectral candlestick's
 Branch the disciple's arms? Dead swooned he, woke
 Anon, heaved sigh, made shift to gasp, heart-broke,
 "Get thee behind me, Satan! have I toiled
 To no more purpose? is the gospel foiled
 Here too, and o'er my son's, my Xanthus' hearth,
 Portrayed with sooty garb and features swarth —
 Ah Xanthus, am I to thy roof beguiled
 To see the — the — the Devil domiciled?"
 Whereto sobbed Xanthus, "Father, 't is yourself

Installed, a limning which our utmost pelf
Went to procure against to-morrow's loss ;
And that 's no twy-prong, but a pastoral cross,
You 're painted with !” His puckered brows unfold —
And you shall hear Sordello's story told.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

MEN SUFFERED MUCH,

MEANTIME Ferrara lay in rueful case ;
The lady-city, for whose sole embrace
Her pair of suitors struggled, felt their arms
A brawny mischief to the fragile charms
They tugged for — one discovering that to twist
Her tresses twice or thrice about his wrist
Secured a point of vantage — one, how best
He'd parry that by planting in her breast
His elbow-spike — each party too intent
For noticing, howe'er the battle went,
The conqueror would but have a corpse to kiss.
“ May Boniface be duly damned for this ! ”
— Howled some old Ghibellin, as up he turned,
From the wet heap of rubbish where they burned
His house, a little skull with dazzling teeth :
“ A boon, sweet Christ — let Salinguerra seethe
In hell forever, Christ, and let myself
Be there to laugh at him ! ” — moaned some young Guelf
Stumbling upon a shrivelled hand nailed fast
To the charred lintel of the doorway, last
His father stood within to bid him speed.
The thoroughfares were overrun with weed
— Docks, quitchgrass, loathly mallows no man plants.

The stranger, none of its inhabitants
 Crept out of doors to taste fresh air again,
 And ask the purpose of a sumptuous train
 Admitted on a morning; every town
 Of the East League was come by envoy down
 To treat for Richard's ransom: here you saw
 The Vicentine, here snowy oxen draw
 The Paduan carroch, its vermilion cross
 On its white field. A-tiptoe o'er the fosse
 Looked Legate Montelungo wistfully
 After the flock of steeples he might spy
 In Este's time, gone (doubts he) long ago
 To mend the ramparts — sure the laggards know
 The Pope's as good as here! They paced the streets
 More soberly. At last, "Taurello greets
 The League," announced a pursuivant, — "will match
 Its courtesy, and labors to despatch
 At earliest Tito, Friedrich's Pretor, sent
 On pressing matters from his post at Trent,
 With Mainard Count of Tyrol, — simply waits
 Their going to receive the delegates."
 "Tito!" Our delegates exchanged a glance,
 And, keeping the main way, admired askance
 The lazy engines of outlandish birth,
 Couched like a king each on its bank of earth —
 Arbalist, manganel, and catapult;
 While stationed by, as waiting a result,
 Lean silent gangs of mercenaries ceased
 Working to watch the strangers. "This, at least,

H

Were better spared ; he scarce presumes gainsay
 The League's decision ! Get our friend away
 And profit for the future : how else teach
 Fools 't is not safe to stray within claw's reach
 Ere Salinguerra's final gasp be blown ?
 Those mere convulsive scratches find the bone.
 Who bade him bloody the spent osprey's nare ? ”

The carrochs halted in the public square.
 Pennons of every blazon once a-flaunt,
 Men prattled, freelier that the crested gaunt
 White ostrich with a horse-shoe in her beak
 Was missing, and whoever chose might speak
Ecelin boldly out : so, — “ *Ecelin*
 Needed his wife to swallow half the sin
 And sickens by himself : the Devil's whelp,
 He styles his son, dwindles away, no help
 From conserves, your fine triple-curved froth
 Of virgin's blood, your Venice viper-broth —
 Eh ? Jubilate ! Peace ! no little word
 You utter here that 's not distinctly heard
 Up at Oliero : he was absent sick
 When we besieged Bassano — who, i' the thick
 O' the work, perceived the progress Azzo made,
 Like *Ecelin*, through his witch *Adelaide* ?
 She managed it so well that, night by night,
 At their bed-foot stood up a soldier-sprite
 First fresh, pale by and by without a wound,
 And, when it came with eyes filmed as in swoond,
 They knew the place was taken. Ominous

That Ghibellins should get what cautious
 Old Redbeard sought from Azzo's sire to wrench
 Vainly; Saint George contrived his town a trench
 O' the marshes, an impermeable bar.
 Young Ecelin is meant the tutelar
 Of Padua, rather; veins embrace upon
 His hand like Brenta and Bacchiglion.
 What now? The founts! God's bread, touch not a
 A crawling hell of carrion — every tank [plank!
 Choke full! — found out just now to Cino's cost —
 The same who gave Taurello up for lost,
 And, making no account of fortune's freaks,
 Refused to budge from Padua then, but sneaks
 Back now with Concorezzi — 'faith! they drag
 Their carroch to San Vital, plant the flag
 On his own palace so adroitly razed
 He knew it not; a sort of Guelf folk gazed
 And laughed apart; Cino disliked their air —
 Must pluck up spirit, show he does not care —
 Seats himself on the tank's edge — will begin
 To hum, *za, za, Cavalier Ecelin* —
 A silence; he gets warmer, clinks to chime,
 Now both feet plough the ground, deeper each time,
 At last, *za, za*, and up with a fierce kick
 Comes his own mother's face caught by the thick
 Gray hair about his spur!"

Which means, they lift

The covering, Salinguerra made a shift
 To stretch upon the truth; as well avoid

Further disclosures ; leave them thus employed.
 Our dropping Autumn morning clears apace,
 And poor Ferrara puts a softened face
 On her misfortunes. Let us scale this tall
 Huge foursquare line of red brick garden-wall
 Bastioned within by trees of every sort
 On three sides, slender, spreading, long and short,
 — Each grew as it contrived, the poplar ramped,
 The fig-tree reared itself, — but stark and cramped,
 Made fools of, like tamed lions ; whence, on the edge,
 Running 'twixt trunk and trunk to smooth one ledge
 Of shade, were shrubs inserted, warp and woof,
 Which smothered up that variance. Scale the roof
 Of solid tops, and o'er the slope you slide
 Down to a grassy space level and wide,
 Here and there dotted with a tree, but trees
 Of rarer leaf, each foreigner at ease,
 Set by itself : and in the centre spreads,
 Born upon three uneasy leopards' heads,
 A laver, broad and shallow, one bright spirt
 Of water bubbles in. The walls begirt
 With trees leave off on either hand ; pursue
 Your path along a wondrous avenue
 Those walls abut on, heaped of gleamy stone,
 With aloes leering everywhere, gray-grown
 From many a Moorish summer : how they wind
 Out of the fissures ! likelier to bind
 The building than those rusted cramps which drop
 Already in the eating sunshine. Stop,

You fleeting shapes above there ! Ah, the pride
 Or else despair of the whole country-side —
 A range of statues, swarming o'er with wasps,
 God, goddess, woman, man, the Greek rough-rasps
 In crumbling Naples marble ! meant to look
 Like those Messina marbles Constance took
 Delight in, or Taurello's self conveyed
 To Mantua for his mistress, Adelaide,
 A certain font with caryatides
 Since cloistered at Goito ; only, these
 Are up and doing, not abashed, a troop
 Able to right themselves — who see you, stoop
 O' the instant after you their arms ! Unplucked
 By this or that, you pass, for they conduct
 To terrace raised on terrace, and, between,
 Creatures of brighter mould and braver mien
 Than any yet, the choicest of the Isle
 No doubt. Here, left a sullen breathing-while,
 Up-gathered on himself the Fighter stood
 For his last fight, and, wiping treacherous blood
 Out of the eyelids just held ope beneath
 Those shading fingers in their iron sheath,
 Steadied his strengths amid the buzz and stir
 Of the dusk hideous amphitheatre
 At the announcement of his over-match
 To wind the day's diversion up, despatch
 The pertinacious Gaul : while, limbs one heap,
 The Slave, no breath in her round mouth, watched leap
 Dart after dart forth, as her hero's car

Clove dizzily the solid of the war
 — Let coil about his knees for pride in him.
 We reach the farthest terrace, and the grim
 San Pietro Palace stops us.

Such the state

Of Salinguerra's plan to emulate
 Sicilian marvels, that his girlish wife
 Retrude still might lead her ancient life
 In her new home — whereat enlarged so much
 Neighbors upon the novel princely touch
 He took, — who here imprisons Boniface.
 Here must the Envoys come to sue for grace ;
 And here, emerging from the labyrinth
 Below, Sordello paused beside the plinth
 Of the door-pillar.

He had really left.

Verona for the cornfields (a poor theft
 From the morass) where Este's camp was made ;
 The Envoys' march, the Legate's cavalcade —
 All had been seen by him, but scarce as when,
 Eager for cause to stand aloof from men
 At every point save the fantastic tie
 Acknowledged in his boyish sophistry,
 He made account of such. A crowd, — he meant
 To task the whole of it ; each part's intent
 Concerned him therefore : and, the more he pried,
 The less became Sordello satisfied
 With his own figure at the moment. Sought
 He respite from his task ? descried he aught

Novel in the anticipated sight
 Of all these livers upon all delight?
 This phalanx, as of myriad points combined,
 Whereby he still had imaged that mankind
 His youth was passed in dreams of rivalling,
 His age — in plans to prove at least such thing
 Had been so dreamed, — which now he must impress
 With his own will, effect a happiness
 By theirs, — supply a body to his soul
 Thence, and become eventually whole
 With them as he had hoped to be without —
 Made these the mankind he once raved about?
 Because a few of them were notable,
 Should all be figured worthy note? As well
 Expect to find Taurello's triple line
 Of trees a single and prodigious pine.
 Real pines rose here and there; but, close among,
 Thrust into and mixed up with pines, a throng
 Of shrubs, he saw, — a nameless common sort
 O'erpast in dreams, left out of the report
 And hurried into corners, or at best
 Admitted to be fancied like the rest.
 Reckon that morning's proper chiefs — how few!
 And yet the people grew, the people grew,
 Grew ever, as if the many there indeed,
 More left behind and most who should succeed, —
 Simply in virtue of their mouths and eyes,
 Petty enjoyments and huge miseries, —
 Mingled with, and made veritably great

Those chiefs : he overlooked not Mainard's state
 Nor Concorezzi's station, but instead
 Of stopping there, each dwindled to be head
 Of infinite and absent Tyrolese
 Or Paduans ; startling all the more, that these
 Seemed passive and disposed of, uncared for,
 " Yet doubtless on the whole " (quoth Eglamor)
 " Smiling — for if a wealthy man decays
 And out of store of robes must wear, all days,
 One tattered suit, alike in sun and shade,
 'T is commonly some tarnished gay brocade
 Fit for a feast-night's flourish and no more :
 Nor otherwise poor Misery from her store
 Of looks is fain to upgather, keep unfurled
 For common wear as she goes through the world,
 The faint remainder of some worn-out smile
 Meant for a feast-night's service merely." While
 Crowd upon crowd rose on Sordello thus, —
 (Crowds no way interfering to discuss,
 Much less dispute, life's joys with one employed
 In envying them, — or, if they aught enjoyed,
 Where lingered something indefinable
 In every look and tone, the mirth as well
 As woe, that fixed at once his estimate
 Of the result, their good or bad estate) —
 Old memories returned with new effect :
 And the new body, ere he could suspect,
 Cohered, mankind and he were really fused,
 The new self seemed impatient to be used

By him, but utterly another way
 To that anticipated: strange to say,
 They were too much below him, more in thrall
 Than he, the adjunct than the principal.
 What bootéd scattered units? — here a mind
 And there, which might repay his own to find,
 And stamp, and use? — a few, howe'er august,
 If all the rest were grovelling in the dust?
 No: first a mighty equilibrium, sure,
 Should he establish, privilege procure
 For all, the few had long possessed! he felt
 An error, an exceeding error melt —
 While he was occupied with Mantuan chants,
 Behooved him think of men, and take their wants,
 Such as he now distinguished every side,
 As his own want which might be satisfied, —
 And, after that, think of rare qualities
 Of his own soul demanding exercise.
 It followed naturally, through no claim
 On their part, which made virtue of the aim
 At serving them, on his, — that, past retrieve,
 He felt now in their toils, theirs — nor could leave
 Wonder how, in the eagerness to rule,
 Impress his will on mankind, he (the fool!)
 Had never even entertained the thought
 That this his last arrangement might be fraught
 With incidental good to them as well,
 And that mankind's delight would help to swell
 His own. So, if he sighed, as formerly

Because the merry time of life must fleet,
 'T was deeper now, — for could the crowds repeat
 Their poor experiences? His hand that shook
 Was twice to be deplored. “The Legate, look!
 With eyes, like fresh-blown thrush-eggs on a thread,
 Faint-blue and loosely floating in his head,
 Large tongue, moist open mouth; and this long while
 That owner of the idiotic smile
 Serves them!” He fortunately saw in time
 His fault however, and since the office prime
 Includes the secondary — best accept
 Both offices; Taurello, its adept,
 Could teach him the preparatory one,
 And how to do what he had fancied done
 Long previously, ere take the greater task.
 How render first these people happy? ask
 The people's friends: for there must be one good,
 One way to it — the Cause! — he understood
 The meaning now of Palma; why the jar
 Else, the ado, the trouble wide and far
 Of Guelfs and Ghibellins, the Lombard's hope
 And Rome's despair? — 'twixt Emperor and Pope
 The confused shifting sort of Eden tale —
 Still hardihood recurring, still to fail —
 That foreign interloping fiend, this free
 And native overbrooding deity —
 Yet a dire fascination o'er the palms
 The Kaiser ruined, troubling even the calms
 Of Paradise — or, on the other hand,

The Pontiff, as the Kaisers understand,
 One snake-like cursed of God to love the ground,
 Whose heavy length breaks in the noon profound
 Some saving tree — which needs the Kaiser, drest
 As the dislodging angel of that pest,
 Then — yet that pest bedropt, flat head, full fold,
 With coruscating dower of dyes. “Behold
 The secret, so to speak, and master-spring
 Of the contest! which of the two Powers shall bring
 Men good — perchance the most good — ay, it may
 Be that! the question, which best knows the way.”

And hereupon Count Mainard strutted past
 Out of San Pietro; never seemed the last
 Of archers, slingers: and our friend began
 To recollect strange modes of serving man —
 Arbalist, catapult, brake, manganel,
 And more. “This way of theirs may, — who can tell? —
 Need perfecting,” said he: “let all be solved
 At once! Taurello ’t is, the task devolved
 On late — confront Taurello!”

And at last

He did confront him. Scarcely an hour past
 When forth Sordello came, older by years
 Than at his entry. Unexampled fears
 Oppressed him, and he staggered off, blind, mute
 And deaf, like some fresh-mutilated brute,
 Into Ferrara — not the empty town
 That morning witnessed: he went up and down
 Streets whence the veil had been stripped shred by shred,

So that, in place of huddling with their dead
 Indoors, to answer Salinguerra's ends,
 Its folk made shift to crawl forth, sit like friends
 With any one. A woman gave him choice
 Of her two daughters, the infantile voice
 Or the dimpled knee, for half a chain, his throat
 Was clasped with; but an archer knew the coat —
 Its blue cross and eight lilies, — bade beware
 One dogging him in concert with the pair
 Though thrumming on the sleeve that hid his knife.
 Night set in early, autumn dewes were rife,
 They kindled great fires while the Leaguer's mass
 Began at every carroch — he must pass
 Between the kneeling people. Presently
 The carroch of Verona caught his eye
 With purple trappings; silently he bent
 Over its fire, when voices violent
 Began, "Affirm not whom the youth was like
 That, striking from the porch, I did not strike
 Again; I too have chestnut hair; my kin
 Hate Azzo and stand up for Ecelin.
 Here, minstrel, drive bad thoughts away! sing! take
 My glove for guerdon!" and for that man's sake
 He turned: "A song of Eglamor's!" — scarce named,
 When, "Our Sordello's, rather!" all exclaimed;
 "Is not Sordello famousest for rhyme?"
 He had been happy to deny, this time, —
 Profess as heretofore the aching head
 And failing heart, — suspect that in his stead

Some true Apollo had the charge of them,
 Was champion to reward or to condemn,
 So his intolerable risk might shift
 Or share itself; but Naddo's precious gift
 Of gifts, he owned, be certain! At the close —
 "I made that," said he to a youth who rose
 As if to hear: 't was Palma through the band
 Conducted him in silence by her hand.

Back now for Salinguerra. Tito of Trent
 Gave place to Palma and her friend; who went
 In turn at Montelungo's visit — one
 After the other were they come and gone, —
 These spokesmen for the Kaiser and the Pope,
 This incarnation of the People's hope,
 Sordello, — all the say of each was said,
 And Salinguerra sat, himself instead
 Of these to talk with, lingered musing yet.
 'T was a drear vast presence-chamber roughly set
 In order for the morning's use; full face,
 The Kaiser's ominous sign-mark had first place,
 The crowned grim twy-necked eagle, coarsely blacked
 With ochre on the naked wall; nor lacked
 Romano's green and yellow either side;
 But the new token Tito brought had tried
 The Legate's patience — nay, if Palma knew
 What Salinguerra almost meant to do
 Until the sight of her restored his lip
 A certain half-smile, three months' chieftainship
 Had banished! Afterward, the Legate found

No change in him, nor asked what badge he wound
 And unwound carelessly. Now sat the Chief
 Silent as when our couple left, whose brief
 Encounter wrought so opportune effect
 In thoughts he summoned not, nor would reject.
 Though time 't was now if ever, to pause — fix
 On any sort of ending: wiles and tricks
 Exhausted, judge! his charge, the crazy town,
 Just managed to be hindered crashing down —
 His last sound troops ranged — care observed to post
 His best of the maimed soldiers innermost —
 So much was plain enough, but somehow struck
 Him not before. And now with this strange luck
 Of Tito's news, rewarding his address
 So well, what thought he of? — how the success
 With Friedrich's rescript there, would either hush
 Old Ecelin's scruples, bring the manly flush
 To his young son's white cheek, or, last, exempt
 Himself from telling what there was to tempt?
 No: that this minstrel was Romano's last
 Servant — himself the first! Could he contrast
 The whole! that minstrel's thirty years just spent
 In doing naught, their notablest event
 This morning's journey hither, as I told —
 Who yet was lean, outworn and really old,
 A stammering awkward man that scarce dared raise
 His eye before the magisterial gaze —
 And Salinguerra with his fears and hopes
 Of sixty years, his Emperors and Popes,

Cares and contrivances, yet, you would say,
 'T was a youth nonchalantly looked away
 Through the embrasure northward o'er the sick
 Expostulating trees — so agile, quick
 And graceful turned the head on the broad chest
 Encased in pliant steel, his constant vest.
 Whence split the sun off in a spray of fire
 Across the room ; and, loosened of its tire
 Of steel, that head let breathe the comely brown
 Large massive locks discolored as if a crown
 Encircled them, so frayed the basnet where
 A sharp white line divided clean the hair ;
 Glossy above, glossy below, it swept
 Curling and fine about a brow thus kept
 Calm, laid coat upon coat, marble and sound :
 This was the mystic mark the Tuscan found,
 Mused of, turned over books about. Square-faced,
 No lion more ; two vivid eyes, enchased
 In hollows filled with many a shade and streak
 Settling from the bold nose and bearded cheek ;
 Nor might the half-smile reach them that deformed
 A lip supremely perfect else — unwarmed,
 Unwidened, less or more ; indifferent
 Whether on trees or men his thoughts were bent,
 Thoughts rarely, after all, in trim and train
 As now a period was fulfilled again ;
 Of such, a series made his life, compressed
 In each, one story serving for the rest —
 How his life-streams rolling arrived at last

At the barrier, whence, were it once overpast,
 They would emerge, a river to the end, —
 Gathered themselves up, paused, bade fate befriend,
 Took the leap, hung a minute at the height,
 Then fell back to oblivion infinite :
 Therefore he smiled. Beyond stretched garden-grounds
 Where late the adversary, breaking bounds,
 Had gained him an occasion, That above,
 That eagle, testified he could improve
 Effectually. The Kaiser's symbol lay
 Beside his rescript, a new badge by way
 Of baldric ; while, — another thing that marred
 Alike emprise, achievement and reward, —
 Ecelin's missive was conspicuous too.

What past life did those flying thoughts pursue ?
 As his, few names in Mantua half so old ;
 But at Ferrara, where his sires enrolled
 It latterly, the Adelardi spared
 No pains to rival them : both factions shared
 Ferrara, so that, counted out, 't would yield
 A product very like the city's shield,
 Half black and white, or Ghibellin and Guef,
 As after Salinguerra styled himself
 And Este who, till Marchesalla died,
 (Last of the Adelardi) — never tried
 His fortune there : with Marchesalla's child
 Would pass, — could Blacks and Whites be reconciled
 And young Taurello wed Linguetta, — wealth
 And sway to a sole grasp. Each treats by stealth

Already: when the Guelfs, the Ravennese
 Arrive, assault the Pietro quarter, seize
 Linguetta, and are gone! Men's first dismay
 Abated somewhat, hurries down, to lay
 The after indignation, Boniface,
 This Richard's father. "Learn the full disgrace
 Averted, ere you blame us Guelfs, who rate
 Your Salinguerra, your sole potentate
 That might have been, 'mongst Este's valvassors —
 Ay, Azzo's — who, not privy to, abhors
 Our step — but we were zealous." Azzo's then
 To do with! Straight a meeting of old men:
 "Old Salinguerra dead, his heir a boy,
 What if we change our ruler and decoy
 The Lombard Eagle of the azure sphere,
 With Italy to build in, fix him here,
 Settle the city's troubles in a trice?
 For private wrong, let public good suffice!"
 In fine, young Salinguerra's stanchest friends
 Talked of the townsmen making him amends,
 Gave him a goshawk, and affirmed there was
 Rare sport, one morning, over the green grass
 A mile or so. He sauntered through the plain,
 Was restless, fell to thinking, turned again
 In time for Azzo's entry with the bride;
 Count Boniface rode smirking at their side:
 "She brings him half Ferrara," whispers flew,
 "And all Ancona! If the stripling knew!"
 Anon the stripling was in Sicily

Where Heinrich ruled in right of Constance ; he
 Was gracious nor his guest incapable ;
 Each understood the other. So it fell,
 One Spring, when Azzo, thoroughly at ease,
 Had near forgotten by what precise degrees
 He crept at first to such a downy seat,
 The Count trudged over in a special heat
 To bid him of God's love dislodge from each
 Of Salinguerra's palaces, — a breach
 Might yawn else, not so readily to shut,
 For who was just arrived at Mantua but
 The youngster, sword on thigh, and tuft on chin,
 With tokens for Celano, Ecelin,
 Pistore and the like ! Next news, — no whit
 Do any of Ferrara's domes befit
 His wife of Heinrich's very blood : a band
 Of foreigners assemble, understand
 Garden-constructing, level and surround,
 Build up and bury in. A last news crowned
 The consternation : since his infant's birth,
 He only waits they end his wondrous girth
 Of trees that link San Pietro with Tomà,
 To visit Mantua. When the Podestà
 Ecelin, at Vicenza, called his friend
 Taurello thither, what could be their end
 But to restore the Ghibellins' late Head,
 The Kaiser helping ? He with most to dread
 From vengeance and reprisal, Azzo, there
 With Boniface beforehand, as aware

Of plots in progress, gave alarm, expelled
 Both plotters : but the Guelfs in triumph yelled
 Too hastily. The burning and the flight,
 And how Taurello, occupied that night
 With Ecelin, lost wife and son, I told :
 — Not how he bore the blow, retained his hold,
 Got friends safe through, left enemies the worst
 O' the fray, and hardly seemed to care at first —
 But afterward men heard not constantly
 Of Salinguerra's House so sure to be !
 Though Azzo simply gained by the event :
 A shifting of his plagues — the first, content
 To fall behind the second and estrange
 So far his nature, suffer such a change
 That in Romano sought he wife and child,
 And for Romano's sake seemed reconciled
 To losing individual life, which shrunk
 As the other prospered — mortised in his trunk ;
 Like a dwarf palm which wanton Arabs foil
 Of bearing its own proper wine and oil,
 By grafting into it the stranger-vine,
 Which sucks its heart out, sly and serpentine,
 Till forth one vine-palm feathers to the root,
 And red drops moisten the insipid fruit.
 Once Adelaide set on, — the subtle mate
 Of the weak soldier, urged to emulate
 The Church's valiant women deed for deed,
 And paragon her namesake, win the meed
 Of the great Matilda, — soon they overbore

The rest of Lombardy, — not as before
 By an instinctive truculence, but patched
 The Kaiser's strategy until it matched
 The Pontiff's, sought old ends by novel means.
 "Only, why is it Salinguerra screens
 Himself behind Romano? — him we bade
 Enjoy our shine i' the front, not seek the shade!"
 — Asked Heinrich, somewhat of the tardiest
 To comprehend. Nor Philip acquiesced
 At once in the arrangement; reasoned, plied
 His friend with offers of another bride,
 A statelier function — fruitlessly: 't was plain
 Taurello through some weakness must remain
 Obscure. And Otho, free to judge of both,
 — Ecelin the unready, harsh and loath,
 And this more plausible and facile wight
 With every point a-sparkle — chose the right,
 Admiring how his predecessors harped
 On the wrong man: "thus," quoth he, "wits are
 warped
 By outsides!" Carelessly, meanwhile, his life
 Suffered its many turns of peace and strife
 In many lands — you hardly could surprise
 The man; — who shamed Sordello (recognize!)
 In this as much beside, that, unconcerned
 What qualities were natural or earned,
 With no ideal of graces, as they came
 He took them, singularly well the same —
 Speaking the Greek's own language, just because

Your Greek eludes you, leave the least of flaws
 In contracts with him ; while, since Arab lore
 Holds the stars' secret — take one trouble more
 And master it ! 'Tis done, and now deter
 Who may the Tuscan, once Jove trined for her,
 From Friedrich's path ! — Friedrich, whose pilgrimage
 The same man puts aside, whom he 'll engage
 To leave next year John Brienne in the lurch,
 Come to Bassano, see Saint Francis' church
 And judge of Guido the Bolognian's piece
 Which, lend Taurello credit, rivals Greece —
 Angels, with aureoles like golden quoits
 Pitched home, applauding Ecelin's exploits.
 For elegance, he strung the angelot,
 Made rhymes thereto ; for prowess, clove he not
 Tiso, last siege, from crest to crupper ? Why
 Detail you thus a varied mastery
 But to show how Taurello, on the watch
 For men, to read their hearts and thereby catch
 Their capabilities and purposes,
 Displayed himself so far as displayed these :
 While our Sordello only cared to know
 About men as a means whereby he 'd show
 Himself, and men had much or little worth
 According as they kept in or drew forth
 That self ; Taurello's choicest instruments
 Surmised him shallow.

Meantime, malecontents
 Dropped off, town after town grew wiser. "How

134 BUT ECELIN, HE SET IN FRONT, FALLING,

Change the world's face?" asked people; "as 't is now
It has been, will be ever: very fine
Subjecting things profane to things divine,
In talk! this contumacy will fatigue
The vigilance of Este and the League!
The Ghibellins gain on us!" — as it happened.
Old Azzo and old Boniface, entrapped
By Ponte Alto, both in one month's space
Slept at Verona: either left a brace
Of sons — but, three years after, either's pair
Lost Guglielm and Aldobrand its heir:
Azzo remained and Richard — all the stay
Of Este and Saint Boniface, at bay
As 't were. Then, either Ecelin grew old
Or his brain altered — not of the proper mould
For new appliances — his old palm-stock
Endured no influx of strange strengths. He 'd rock
As in a drunkenness, or chuckle low
As proud of the completeness of his woe,
Then weep real tears; — now make some mad onslaught
On Este, heedless of the lesson taught
So painfully, — now cringe for peace, sue peace
At price of past gain, — much more, fresh increase
To the fortunes of Romano. Up at last
Rose Este, down Romano sank as fast.
And men remarked these freaks of peace and war
Happened while Salinguerra was afar:
Whence every friend besought him, all in vain,
To use his old adherent's wits again.

Not he! — “who had advisers in his sons,
 Could plot himself, nor needed any one’s
 Advice.” ’T was Adelaide’s remaining stanch
 Prevented his destruction root and branch
 Forthwith; but when she died, doom fell, for gay
 He made alliances, gave lands away
 To whom it pleased accept them, and withdrew
 Forever from the world. Taurello, who
 Was summoned to the convent, then refused
 A word at the wicket, patience thus abused,
 Promptly threw off alike his imbecile
 Ally’s yoke, and his own frank, foolish smile.
 Soon a few movements of the happier sort
 Changed matters, put himself in men’s report
 As heretofore; he had to fight, beside,
 And that became him ever. So, in pride
 And flushing of this kind of second youth,
 He dealt a good-will blow. Este in truth
 Lay prone — and men remembered, somewhat late,
 A laughing old outrageous stifled hate
 He bore to Este — how it would outbreak
 At times spite of disguise, like an earthquake
 In sunny weather — as that noted day
 When with his hundred friends he tried to slay
 Azzo before the Kaiser’s face: and how,
 On Azzo’s calm refusal to allow
 A liegeman’s challenge, straight he too was calmed:
 As if his hate could bear to lie embalmed,
 Bricked up, the moody Pharaoh, and survive

All intermediate crumbings, and arrive
 At earth's catastrophe — 't was Este's crash
 Not Azzo's he demanded, so, no rash
 Procedure! Este's true antagonist
 Rose out of Ecelin: all voices whist,
 All eyes were sharpened, wits predicted. He
 'T was, leaned in the embrasure absently,
 Amused with his own efforts, now, to trace
 With his steel-sheathed forefinger Friedrich's face
 I' the dust: but as the trees waved sere, his smile
 Deepened, and words expressed its thought erewhile.

“Ay, fairly housed at last, my old compeer?
 That we should stick together, all the year,
 I kept Verona! — How old Boniface,
 Old Azzo caught us in its market-place,
 He by that pillar, I at this, — caught each
 In mid swing, more than fury of his speech,
 Egging the rabble on to disavow
 Allegiance to their Marquis — Bacchus, how
 They boasted! Ecelin must turn their drudge,
 Nor, if released, will Salinguerra grudge
 Paying arrears of tribute due long since —
 Bacchus! My man, could promise then, nor wince,
 The bones-and-muscles! sound of wind and limb,
 Spoke he the set excuse I framed for him:
 And now he sits me, slaving and mute,
 Intent on chafing each starved purple foot
 Benumbed past aching with the altar slab —
 Will no vein throb there when some monk shall blab

Spitefully to the circle of bald scalps,
 'Friedrich's affirmed to be our side the Alps'
 — Eh, brother Lactance, brother Anaclet?
 Sworn to abjure the world, its fume and fret,
 God's own now? Drop the dormitory bar,
 Enfold the scanty gray serge scapular
 Twice o'er the cowl to muffle memories out —
 So! but the midnight whisper turns a shout,
 Eyes wink, mouths open, pulses circulate
 In the stone walls: the Past, the world you hate
 Is with you, ambush, open field — or see
 The surging flame — we fire Vicenza — glee!
 Follow, let Pilio and Bernardo chafe —
 Bring up the Mantuans — through San Biagio — safe!
 Ah, the mad people waken? Ah, they writhe
 And reach us? if they block the gate — no tithe
 Can pass — keep back, you Bassanese! the edge,
 Use the edge — shear, thrust, hew, melt down the
 wedge,
 Let out the black of those black upturned eyes!
 Hell — are they sprinkling fire too? the blood fries
 And hisses on your brass gloves as they tear
 Those upturned faces choking with despair.
 Brave! Slidder through the reeking gate — 'how now?
 You six had charge of her?' And then the vow
 Comes, and the foam spirts, hair's plucked, till one
 shriek
 ('I hear it) and you fling — you cannot speak —
 Your gold-flowered basnet to a man who haled

The Adelaide he dared scarce view unveiled
 This morn, naked across the fire: how crown
 The archer that exhausted lays you down
 Your infant, smiling at the flame, and dies?
 While one, while mine . . .

Bacchus! I think there lies

More than one corpse there" (and he paced the room)
 "— Another cinder somewhere — 't was my doom
 Beside, my doom! If Adelaide is dead
 I am the same, this Azzo lives instead
 Of that to me, and we pull, any how,
 Este into a heap — the matter's now
 At the true juncture slipping us so oft.
 Ay, Heinrich died and Otho, please you, doffed
 His crown at such a juncture! still, if hold
 Our Friedrich's purpose, if this chain enfold
 The neck of . . . who but this same Ecelin
 That must recoil when the best days begin!
 Recoil? that's naught; if the recoiler leaves
 His name for me to fight with, no one grieves!
 But he must interfere, forsooth, unlock
 His cloister to become my stumbling-block
 Just as of old! Ay, ay, there 't is again —
 The land's inevitable Head — explain
 The reverences that subject us! Count
 These Ecelins now! not to say as fount,
 Originating power of thought, — from twelve
 That drop i' the trenches they joined hands to delve,
 Six shall surpass him, but . . . why, men must twine

Somehow with something! *Ecelin* 's a fine
Clear name! 'T were simpler, doubtless, twine with me
At once: our cloistered friend's capacity
Was of a sort! I had to share myself
In fifty portions, like an o'ertasked elf
That 's forced illume in fifty points the vast
Rare vapor he 's environed by. At last
My strengths, though sorely frittered, e'en converge
And crown . . . no, Bacchus, they have yet to urge
The man be crowned!

That aloe, an he durst,
Would climb! just such a bloated sprawler first
I noted in Messina's castle-court
The day I came, when Heinrich asked in sport
If I would pledge my faith to win him back
His right in Lombardy: 'for, once bid pack
Marauders,' he continued, 'in my stead
You rule, Taurello!' and upon this head
Laid the silk glove of Constance — I see her
Too, mantled head to foot in miniver,
Retrude following!

I am absolved
From further toil: the empery devolved
On me, 't was Tito's word: I have to lay
For once my plan, pursue my plan my way,
Prompt nobody, and render an account
Taurello to Taurello! nay, I mount
To Friedrich — he conceives the post I kept,
Who did true service, able or inept,

Who's worthy guerdon, Ecelin or I.
 Me guerdoned, counsel follows; would he vie
 With the Pope really? Azzo, Boniface
 Compose a right-arm Hohenstauffen's race
 Must break ere govern Lombardy. I point
 How easy 't were to twist, once out of joint,
 The socket from the bone: — my Azzo's stare
 Meanwhile! for I, this idle strap to wear,
 Shall — fret myself abundantly, what end
 To serve? There's left me twenty years to spend
 — How better than my old way? Had I one
 Who labored overthrow my work — a son
 Hatching with Azzo superb treachery,
 To root my pines up and then poison me,
 Suppose — 't were worth while frustrate that! Beside,
 Another life's ordained me: the world's tide
 Rolls, and what hope of parting from the press
 Of waves, a single wave through weariness
 Gently lifted aside, laid upon shore?
 My life must be lived out in foam and roar,
 No question. Fifty years the province held
 Taurello; troubles raised, and troubles quelled,
 He in the midst — who leaves this quaint stone place,
 These trees a year or two, then, not a trace
 Of him! How obtain hold, fether men's tongues
 Like this poor minstrel with the foolish songs —
 To which, despite our bustle, he is linked?
 — Flowers one may tease, that never grow extinct.
 Ay, that patch, surely, green as ever, where

I set Her Moorish lentisk, by the stair,
To overawe the aloes; and we trod
Those flowers, how call you such? — into the sod;
A stately foreigner — a world of pain
To make it thrive, arrest rough winds — all vain!
It would decline; these would not be destroyed:
And now, where is it? where can you avoid
The flowers? I frighten children twenty years
Longer! — which way, too, Ecelin appears
To thwart me, for his son's besotted youth
Gives promise of the proper tiger-tooth:
They feel it at Vicenza! Fate, fate, fate,
My fine Taurello! go you, promulgate
Friedrich's decree, and here's shall aggrandize
Young Ecelin — your Prefect's badge! a prize
Too precious, certainly.

How now? Compete
With my old comrade? shuffle from their seat
His children? Paltry dealing! Don't I know
Ecelin? now, I think, and years ago!
What's changed — the weakness? did not I compound
For that, and undertake to keep him sound
Despite it? Here's Taurello hankering
After a boy's preferment — this plaything
To carry, Bacchus!" And he laughed.

Remark

Why schemes wherein cold-blooded men embark
Prosper, when your enthusiastic sort
Fail: while these last are ever stopping short —

(So much they should — so little they can do !)
 The careless tribe see nothing to pursue
 If they desist ; meantime their scheme succeeds.

Thoughts were caprices in the course of deeds
 Methodic with Taurello ; so, he turned,
 Enough amused by fancies fairly earned
 Of Este's horror-struck submitted neck,
 And Richard, the cowed braggart, at his beck, —
 To his own petty but immediate doubt
 If he could pacify the League without
 Conceding Richard ; just to this was brought
 That interval of vain discursive thought !
 As, shall I say, some Ethiop, past pursuit
 Of all enslavers, dips a shackled foot
 Burnt to the blood, into the drowsy black
 Enormous watercourse which guides him back
 To his own tribe again, where he is king ;
 And laughs because he guesses, numbering
 The yellower poison-wattles on the pouch
 Of the first lizard wrested from its couch
 Under the slime (whose skin, the while, he strips
 To cure his nostril with, and festered lips,
 And eyeballs bloodshot through the desert blast)
 That he has reached its boundary, at last
 May breathe ; — thinks o'er enchantments of the South
 Sovereign to plague his enemies, their mouth,
 Eyes, nails, and hair ; but, these enchantments tried
 In fancy, puts them soberly aside
 For truth, projects a cool return with friends,

The likelihood of winning mere amends
 Erelong; thinks that, takes comfort silently,
 Then, from the river's brink, his wrongs and he,
 Hugging revenge close to their hearts, are soon
 Off-striding for the Mountains of the Moon.

Midnight: the watcher nodded on his spear,
 Since clouds dispersing left a passage clear,
 For any meagre and discolored moon
 To venture forth; and such was peering soon
 Above the harassed city — her close lanes
 Closer, not half so tapering her fanes,
 As though she shrunk into herself to keep
 What little life was saved, more safely. Heap
 By heap the watch-fires mouldered, and beside
 The blackest spoke Sordello and replied
 Palma with none to listen. " 'T is your Cause:
 What makes a Ghibellin? There should be laws —
 (Remember how my youth escaped! I trust
 To you for manhood, Palma; tell me just
 As any child) — there must be laws at work
 Explaining this. Assure me, good may lurk
 Under the bad, — my multitude has part
 In your designs, their welfare is at heart
 With Salinguerra, to their interest
 Refer the deeds he dwelt on, — so divest
 Our conference of much that scared me. Why
 Affect that heartless tone to Tito? I
 Esteemed myself, yes, in my inmost mind
 This morn, a recreant to my race — mankind

O'erlooked till now : why boast my spirit's force,
 — Such force denied its object ? why divorce
 These, then admire my spirit's flight the same
 As though it bore up, helped some half-orbed flame
 Else quenched in the dead void, to living space ?
 — That orb cast off to chaos and disgrace,
 Why vaunt so much my unincumbered dance,
 Making a feat's facilities enhance
 Its marvel ? But I front Taurello, one
 Of happier fate, and all I should have done,
 He does ; the people's good being paramount
 With him, their progress may perhaps account
 For his abiding still : whereas you heard
 The talk with Tito — the excuse preferred
 For burning those five hostages, — and broached
 By way of blind, as you and I approached,
 I do believe."

She spoke : then he, " My thought
 Plainlier expressed ! All to your profit — naught
 Meantime of these, of conquests to achieve
 For them, of wretchedness he might relieve
 While profiting your party. Azzo, too,
 Supports a cause : what cause ? Do Guef's pursue
 Their ends by means like yours, or better ? "

When
 The Guef's were proved alike, men weighed with men,
 And deed with deed, blaze, blood, with blood and blaze,
 Morn broke : " Once more, Sordello, meet its gaze
 Proudly — the people's charge against thee fails

In every point, while either party quails!
 These are the busy ones — be silent thou!
 Two parties take the world up, and allow
 No third, yet have one principle, subsist
 By the same injustice; whoso shall enlist
 With either, ranks with man's inveterate foes.
 So there is one less quarrel to compose:
 The Guelf, the Ghibellin may be to curse —
 I have done nothing, but both sides do worse
 Than nothing. Nay, to me, forgotten, reft
 Of insight, lapped by trees and flowers, was left
 The notion of a service — ha? What lured
 Me here, what mighty aim was I assured
 Must move Taurello? What if there remained
 A Cause, intact, distinct from these, ordained,
 For me, its true discoverer?"

Some one pressed

Before them here, a watcher, to suggest
 The subject for a ballad: "They must know
 The tale of the dead worthy, long ago
 Consul of Rome — that's long ago for us,
 Minstrels and bowmen, idly squabbling thus
 In the world's corner — but too late, no doubt,
 For the brave time he sought to bring about.
 — Not know Crescentius Nomentanus?" Then
 He cast about for terms to tell him, when
 Sordello disavowed it, how they used
 Whenever their Superior introduced
 A novice to the Brotherhood — ("for I

146 WHO WAS THE FAMED ROMAN CRESCENTIUS?

Was just a brown-sleeve brother, merrily
 Appointed too," quoth he, "till Innocent
 Bade me relinquish, to my small content,
 My wife or my brown sleeves") — some brother spoke
 Ere nocturns of Crescentius, to revoke
 The edict issued, after his demise,
 Which blotted fame alike and effigies,
 All out except a floating power, a name
 Including, tending to produce the same
 Great act. Rome, dead, forgotten, lived at least
 Within that brain, though to a vulgar priest
 And a vile stranger, — two not worth a slave
 Of Rome's, Pope John, King Otho, — fortune gave
 The rule there: so, Crescentius, haply drest
 In white, called Roman Consul for a jest,
 Taking the people at their word, forth step
 As upon Brutus' heel, nor ever kept
 Rome waiting, — stood erect, and from his brain
 Gave Rome out on its ancient place again,
 Ay, bade proceed with Brutus' Rome, kings styled
 Themselves mere citizens of, and, beguiled
 Into great thoughts thereby, would choose the gem
 Out of a lapful, spoil their diadem
 — The Senate's cipher was so hard to scratch!
 He flashes like a phanal, all men catch
 The flame, Rome's just accomplished! when returned
 Otho, with John, the Consul's step had spurned,
 And Hugo Lord of Este, to redress
 The wrongs of each. Crescentius in the stress

Of adverse fortune bent. "They crucified
 Their Consul in the Forum, and abide
 E'er since such slaves at Rome, that I — (for I
 Was once a brown-sleeve brother, merrily
 Appointed) — I had option to keep wife
 Or keep brown sleeves, and managed in the strife
 Lose both. A song of Rome!"

And Rome, indeed,
 Robed at Goito in fantastic weed,
 The Mother-City of his Mantuan days,
 Looked an established point of light whence rays
 Traversed the world; for, all the clustered homes
 Beside of men, seemed bent on being Romes
 In their degree; the question was, how each
 Should most resemble Rome, clean out of reach.
 Nor, of the great Two, either principle,
 Struggled to change — but to possess — Rome, still,
 Guelf Rome or Ghibellin Rome.

Let Rome advance!
 Rome, as she struck Sordello's ignorance —
 How could he doubt one moment? Rome's the Cause!
 Rome of the Pandects, all the world's new laws —
 Of the Capitol, of Castle Angelo;
 New structures, that inordinately glow,
 Subdued, brought back to harmony, made ripe
 By many a relic of the archetype
 Extant for wonder; every upstart church
 That hoped to leave old temples in the lurch,
 Corrected by the Theatre forlorn

That, — as a mundane shell, its world late born, —
Lay and o'ershadowed it. These hints combined,
Rome typifies the scheme to put mankind
Once more in full possession of their rights.
“Let us have Rome again! On me it lights
To build up Rome — on me, the first and last:
For such a Future was endured the Past!”
And thus, in the gray twilight, forth he sprung
To give his thought consistency among
The very People — let their facts avail
Finish the dream grown from the archer's tale.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

MANKIND TRIUMPH OF A SUDDEN ?

Is it the same Sordello in the dusk
As at the dawn? — merely a perished husk
Now, that arose a power fit to build
Up Rome again? The proud conception chilled
So soon? Ay, watch that latest dream of thine
— A Rome indebted to no Palatine,
Drop arch by arch, Sordello! Art possess
Of thy wish now — rewarded for thy quest
To-day among Ferrara's squalid sons —
Are this and this and this the shining ones
Meet for the Shining City? Sooth to say,
Your favored tenantry pursue their way
After a fashion! This companion slips
On the smooth causey, t' other blinkard trips
At his mooned sandal. "Leave to lead the brawls
Here i' the atria?" No, friend! He that sprawls
On aught but a stibadium . . what his dues
Who puts the lustral vase to such an use?
O, huddle up the day's disasters! March,
Ye runagates, and drop thou, arch by arch,
Rome!

Yet before they quite disband — a whim —
Study mere shelter, now, for him, and him,

Nay, even the worst, — just house them ! Any cave
 Suffices : throw out earth ! A loophole ? Brave !
 They ask to feel the sun shine, see the grass
 Grow, hear the larks sing ? Dead art thou, alas,
 And I am dead ! But here 's our son excels
 At hurdle-weaving any Scythian, fells
 Oak and devises rafters, dreams and shapes
 His dream into a door-post, just escapes
 The mystery of hinges. Lie we both
 Perdue another age. The goodly growth
 Of brick and stone ! Our building-pelt was rough,
 But that descendant's garb suits well enough
 A portico-contriver. Speed the years —
 What 's time to us ? at last, a city rears
 Itself ! nay, enter — what 's the grave to us ?
 Lo, our forlorn acquaintance carry thus
 The head ! Successively sewer, forum, cirque —
 Last age, an aqueduct was counted work,
 But now they tire the artificer upon
 Blank alabaster, black obsidian,
 — Careful, Jove's face be duly fulgorant,
 And mother Venus' kiss-creased nipples pant
 Back into pristine pulpiness, ere fixed
 Above the baths. What difference betwixt
 This Rome and ours — resemblance what, between
 That scurvy dumb-show and this pageant sheen —
 These Romans and our rabble ? Use thy wit !
 The work marched : step by step, — a workman fit
 Took each, nor too fit, — to one task, one time, —

No leaping o'er the petty to the prime,
 When just the substituting osier lithe
 For brittle bulrush, sound wood for soft withe,
 To further loam-and-roughcast-work a stage, —
 Exacts an architect, exacts an age:
 No tables of the Mauritanian tree
 For men whose maple-log's their luxury!
 That way was Rome built. "Better" (say you)
 "merge

At once all workmen in the demiurge,
 All epochs in a lifetime, every task
 In one!" So should the sudden city bask
 If the day — while those we'd feast there, want the knack
 Of keeping fresh-chalked gowns from speck and brack,
 Distinguish not rare peacock from vile swan,
 Nor Mareotic juice from Cœcuban.
 "Enough of Rome! 'T was happy to conceive
 Rome on a sudden, nor shall fate bereave
 Me of that credit: for the rest, her spite
 Is an old story — serves my folly right
 By adding yet another to the dull
 List of abortions — things proved beautiful
 Could they be done, Sordello cannot do."

He sat upon the terrace, plucked and threw
 The powdery aloe-cusps away, saw shift
 Rome's walls, and drop arch after arch, and drift
 Mist-like afar those pillars of all stripe,
 Mounds of all majesty. "Thou archetype,
 Last of my dreams and loveliest, depart!"

And then a low voice wound into his heart :
 "Sordello!" (low as some old Pythoness
 Conceding to a Lydian King's distress
 The cause of his long error — one mistake
 Of her past oracle) "Sordello, wake!
 God has conceded two sights to a man —
 One, of men's whole work, time's completed plan,
 The other, of the minute's work, man's first
 Step to the plan's completeness: what's dispersed
 Save hope of that supreme step which, desried
 Earliest, was meant still to remain untried
 Only to give you heart to take your own
 Step, and there stay — leaving the rest alone?
 Where is the vanity? Why count as one
 The first step, with the last step? What is gone
 Except Rome's aëry magnificence,
 That last step you'd take first? — an evidence
 You were God: be man now! Let those glances fall!
 The basis, the beginning step of all,
 Which proves you just a man — is that gone too?
 Pity to disconcert one versed as you
 In fate's ill-nature! but its full extent
 Eludes Sordello, even: the veil rent,
 Read the black writing — that collective man
 Outstrips the individual! Who began
 The acknowledged greatnesses? Ay, your own art
 Shall serve us: put the poet's mimes apart —
 Close with the poet's self, and lo, a dim
 Yet too plain form divides itself from him!

Alcamo's song enmeshes the lulled Isle,
 Woven into the echoes left erewhile
 By Nina, one soft web of song : no more
 Turning his name, then, flower-like o'er and o'er !
 An elder poet in the younger's place —
 Nina's the strength — but Alcamo's the grace :
 Each neutralizes each then ! Search your fill ;
 You get no whole and perfect Poet — still
 New Ninas, Alcamos, till time's midnight
 Shrouds all — or better say, the shutting light
 Of a forgotten yesterday. Dissect
 Every ideal workman — (to reject
 In favor of your fearful ignorance
 The thousand phantasms eager to advance,
 And point you but to those within your reach) —
 Were you the first who brought — (in modern speech)
 The Multitude to be materialized ?
 That loose eternal unrest — who devised
 An apparition i' the midst ? The rout
 Was checked, a breathless ring was formed about
 That sudden flower : get round at any risk
 The gold-rough pointel, silver-blazing disk
 O' the lily ! Swords across it ! Reign thy reign
 And serve thy frolic service, Charlemagne !
 — The very child of over-joyousness,
 Unfeeling thence, strong therefore : Strength by stress
 Of Strength comes of that forehead confident,
 Those widened eyes expecting heart's content,
 A calm as out of just-quelled noise ; nor swerves

For doubt, the ample cheek in gracious curves
 Abutting on the upthrust nether lip :
 He wills, how should he doubt then? Ages slip :
 Was it Sordello pried into the work
 So far accomplished, and discovered lurk
 A company amid the other clans,
 Only distinct in priests for castellans
 And popes for suzerains (their rule confessed
 Its rule, their interest its interest,
 Living for sake of living — there an end, —
 Wrapt in itself, no energy to spend
 In making adversaries or allies), —
 Dived you into its capabilities
 And dared create, out of that sect, a soul
 Should turn the multitude, already whole,
 Into its body? Speak plainer! Is 't so sure
 God's church lives by a King's investiture?
 Look to last step! a staggering — a shock —
 What's mere sand is demolished, while the rock
 Endures: a column of black fiery dust
 Blots heaven — that help was prematurely thrust
 Aside, perchance! — but the air clears, naught's erased
 Of the true outline! Thus much being firm based,
 The other was a scaffold. See him stand
 Buttressed upon his mattock, Hildebrand
 Of the hugh brain-mask welded ply o'er ply
 As in a forge; it buries either eye
 White and extinct, that stupid brow; teeth clenched,
 The neck tight-corded, too, the chin deep-trenched,

As if a cloud enveloped him while fought
 Under its shade, grim prizers, thought with thought
 At dead-lock, agonizing he, until
 The victor thought leapt radiant up, and Will,
 The slave with folded arms and drooping lids
 They fought for, lean forth flame-like as it bids.
 Call him no flower — a mandrake of the earth,
 Thwarted and dwarfed and blasted in its birth,
 Rather, a fruit of suffering's excess,
 Thence feeling, therefore stronger: still by stress
 Of Strength, work Knowledge! Full three hundred years
 Have men to wear away in smiles and tears
 Between the two that nearly seem to touch,
 Observe you! quit one workman and you clutch
 Another, letting both their trains go by —
 The actors-out of either's policy,
 Heinrich, on this hand, Otho, Barbaross,
 Carry the three Imperial crowns across,
 Aix' Iron, Milan's Silver, and Rome's Gold —
 While Alexander, Innocent uphold
 On that, each Papal key — but, link on link,
 Why is it neither chain betrays a chink?
 How coalesce the small and great? Alack,
 For one thrust forward, fifty such fall back!
 Do the popes coupled there help Gregory
 Alone? Hark — from the hermit Peter's cry
 At Claremont, down to the first serf that says
 Friedrich's no liege of his while he delays
 Getting the Pope's curse off him! The Crusade —

Or trick of breeding strength by other aid
 Than strength, is safe. Hark — from the wild harangue
 Of Vimmercato, to the carroch's clang
 Yonder! The League — or trick of turning strength
 Against pernicious strength, is safe at length.
 Yet hark — from Mantuan Albert making cease
 The fierce ones, to Saint Francis preaching peace
 Yonder! God's Truce — or trick to supersede
 The very use of strength, is safe. Indeed
 We trench upon the Future! Who is found
 To take next step, next age — trail o'er the ground —
 Shall I say, gourd-like? — not the flower's display
 Nor the root's prowess, but the plenteous way
 O' the plant — produced by joy and sorrow, whence
 Unfeeling and yet feeling, strongest thence?
 Knowledge by stress of merely Knowledge? No —
 E'en were Sordello ready to forego
 His life for this, 't were overleaping work
 Some one has first to do, howe'er it irk,
 Nor stray a foot's breadth from the beaten road.
 Who means to help must still support the load
 Hildebrand lifted — 'why hast Thou,' he groaned,
 'Imposed on me a burden, Paul had moaned,
 And Moses dropped beneath?' Much done — and yet
 Doubtless, that grandest task God ever set
 On man, left much to do: at his arm's wrench,
 Charlemagne's scaffold fell; but pillars blench
 Merely, start back again — perchance have been
 Taken for buttresses: crash every screen,

Hammer the tenons better, and engage
 A gang about your work, for the next age
 Or two, of Knowledge, part by Strength and part
 By Knowledge! Then, indeed, perchance may start
 Sordello on his race — would time divulge
 Such secrets! If one step's awry, one bulge
 Calls for correction by a step we thought
 Got over long since, why, till that is wrought,
 No progress! and the scaffold in its turn
 Becomes, its service o'er, a thing to spurn.
 Meanwhile, if your half-dozen years of life
 In store, dispose you to forego the strife,
 Who takes exception? Only bear in mind,
 Ferrara's reached, Goito's left behind:
 As you then were, as half yourself, desist!
 — The warrior-part of you may, an it list,
 Finding real faulchions difficult to poise,
 Fling them afar and taste the cream of joys
 By wielding such in fancy, — what is bard
 Of you, may spurn the vehicle that marred
 Elys so much, and in free fancy glut
 His sense, yet write no verses — you have but
 To please yourself for law, and once could please
 What once appeared yourself, by dreaming these
 Rather than doing these, in days gone by.
 But all is changed the moment you descry
 Mankind as half yourself, — then, fancy's trade
 Ends once and always: how may half evade
 The other half? men are found half of you.

Out of a thousand helps, just one or two
 Can be accomplished presently : but flinch
 From these (as from the faulchion, raised an inch,
 Elys, described a couplet) and make proof
 Of fancy, — then, while one half lolls aloof
 I' the vines, completing Rome to the tip-top —
 See if, for that, your other half will stop
 A tear, begin a smile ! The rabble's woes,
 Ludicrous in their patience as they chose
 To sit about their town and quietly
 Be slaughtered, — the poor reckless soldiery,
 With their ignoble rhymes on Richard, how
 ' Polt-foot,' sang they, ' was in a pitfall now,'
 Cheering each other from the engine-mounts, —
 That crippled spawling idiot who recounts
 How, lopt of limbs, he lay, stupid as stone,
 Till the pains crept from out him one by one,
 And wriggles round the archers on his head
 To earn a morsel of their chestnut bread, —
 And Cino, always in the selfsame place
 Weeping ; beside that other wretch's case,
 Eyepits to ear, one gangrene since he plied
 The engine in his coat of raw sheep's hide.
 A double watch in the noon sun ; and see
 Lucchino, beauty, with the favors free,
 Trim hacqueton, spruce beard and scented hair,
 Campaigning it for the first time — cut there
 In two already, boy enough to crawl
 For latter orpine round the southern wall,

Tomà, where Richard's kept, because that whore
 Marfisa, the fool never saw before,
 Sickened for flowers this wearisomest siege:
 And Tiso's wife — men liked their pretty liege,
 Cared for her least of whims once, — Berta, wed
 A twelvemonth gone, and, now poor Tiso's dead,
 Delivering herself of his first child
 On that chance heap of wet filth, reconciled
 To fifty gazers!" — (Here a wind below
 Made moody music augural of woe
 From the pine barrier) — "What if, now the scene
 Draws to a close, yourself have really been
 — You, plucking purples in Goito's moss
 Like edges of a trabea (not to cross
 Your consul-humor) or dry aloe-shafts
 For fasces, at Ferrara — he, fate wafts,
 This very age, her whole inheritance
 Of opportunities? Yet you advance
 Upon the last! Since talking is your trade,
 There's Salinguerra left you to persuade:
 Fail! then" —

"No — no — which latest chance secure!"

Leapt up and cried Sordello: "this made sure,
 The Past were yet redeemable; its work
 Was — help the Guelfs, whom I, howe'er it irk,
 Thus help!" He shook the foolish aloe-haulm
 Out of his doublet, paused, proceeded calm
 To the appointed presence. The large head
 Turned on its socket; "And your spokesman," said

The large voice, "is Elcorte's happy sprout?
 Few such" — (so finishing a speech no doubt
 Addressed to Palma, silent at his side)
 — "My sober councils have diversified.
 Elcorte's son! good: forward as you may,
 Our lady's minstrel with so much to say!"
 The hesitating sunset floated back,
 Rosily traversed in the wonted track
 The chamber, from the lattice o'er the girth
 Of pines, to the huge eagle blacked in earth
 Opposite, — outlined sudden, spur to crest,
 That solid Salinguerra, and caressed
 Palma's contour; 't was Day looped back Night's pall;
 Sordello had a chance left spite of all.

And much he made of the convincing speech
 He meant should compensate the Past and reach
 Through his youth's daybreak of unprofit, quite
 To his noon's labor, so proceed till night
 Leisurely! The great argument to bind
 Taurello with the Guelf Cause, body and mind,
 — Came the consummate rhetoric to that?
 Yet most Sordello's argument dropped flat
 Through his accustomed fault of breaking yoke,
 Disjoining him who felt from him who spoke.
 Was't not a touching incident — so prompt
 A rendering the world its just accompt,
 Once proved its debtor? Who'd suppose, before
 This proof, that he, Goito's god of yore,
 At duty's instance could demean himself

So memorably, dwindle to a Guelf?
 Be sure, in such delicious flattery steeped,
 His inmost self at the out-portion peeped
 Thus occupied ; then stole a glance at those
 Appealed to, curious if her color rose
 Or his lip moved, while he discreetly urged
 The need of Lombardy's becoming purged
 At soonest of her barons ; the poor part
 Abandoned thus, missing the blood at heart
 And spirit in brain, unseasonably off
 Elsewhere ! But, though his speech was worthy scoff,
 Good-humored Salinguerra, famed for tact
 And tongue, who, careless of his phrase, ne'er lacked
 The right phrase, and harangued Honorius dumb
 At his accession, — looked as all fell plumb
 To purpose and himself found interest
 In every point his new instructor pressed
 — Left playing with the rescript's white wax seal
 To scrutinize Sordello head and heel.
 Then means he yield assent sure ? No, alas !
 All he replied was, " What, it comes to pass
 That poesy, sooner than politics,
 Makes fade young hair ? " To think such speech could fix
 Taurello !

Then a flash of bitter truth :
 So fantasies could break and fritter youth
 That he had long ago lost earnestness,
 Lost will to work, lost power to even express
 The need of working ! Earth was turned a grave :

No more occasions now, though he should crave
 Just one, in right of superhuman toil,
 To do what was undone, repair such spoil,
 Alter the Past — nothing would give the chance!
 Not that he was to die: he saw askance
 Protract the ignominious years beyond
 To dream in — time to hope and time despond,
 Remember and forget, be sad, rejoice
 As saved a trouble; he might, at his choice,
 One way or other, idle life out, drop
 No few smooth verses by the way — for prop,
 A thyrus, these sad people, all the same,
 Should pick up, and set store by, — far from blame,
 Plant o'er his hearse, convinced his better part
 Survived him. “Rather tear men out the heart
 Of the truth!” — Sordello muttered, and renewed
 His prepositions for the Multitude.

But Salinguerra, who at this attack
 Had thrown great breast and ruffling corslet back
 To hear the better, smilingly resumed
 His task; beneath, the carroch's warning boomed;
 He must decide with Tito; courteously
 He turned then, even seeming to agree
 With his admonisher — “Assist the Pope,
 Extend Guelf domination, fill the scope
 Of the Church, thus based on All, by All, for All —
 Change Secular to Evangelical” —
 Echoing his very sentence: all seemed lost,
 When sudden he looked up, laughingly almost,

To Palma: "This opinion of your friend's —
 For instance, would it answer Palma's ends?
 Best, were it not, turn Guelf, submit our Strength" —
 (Here he drew out his baldric to its length)
 — "To the Pope's Knowledge — let our captive slip,
 Wide to the walls throw ope our gatés, equip
 Azzo with . . . what I hold here? Who 'll subscribe
 To a trite censure of the minstrel tribe
 Henceforward? or pronounce, as Heinrich used,
 'Spear-heads for battle, burr-heads for the joust!' —
 When Constance, for his couplets, would promote
 Alcamo, from a parti-colored coat,
 To holding her lord's stirrup in the wars.
 Not that I see where couplet-making jars
 With common sense: at Mantua I had borne
 This chanted, better than their most forlorn
 Of bull-baits, — that's indisputable!"

Brave!

Whom vanity nigh slew, contempt shall save!
 All's at an end: a Troubadour suppose
 Mankind will class him with their friends or foes?
 A puny uncouth ailing vassal think
 The world and him bound in some special link?
 Abrupt the visionary tether burst —
 What were rewarded here, or what amerced
 If a poor drudge, solicitous to dream
 Deservingly, got tangled by his theme
 So far as to conceit the knack or gift
 Of whatsoe'er it be, of verse, might lift

The globe, a lever like the hand and head
 Of — “Men of Action,” as the Jongleurs said,
 — “The Great Men,” in the people’s dialect?

And not a moment did this scorn affect
 Sordello: scorn the poet? They, for once,
 Asking “what was,” obtained a full response.
 Bid Naddo think at Mantua, he had but
 To look into his promptuary, put
 Finger on a set thought in a set speech:
 But was Sordello fitted thus for each
 Conjecture? Nowise; since, within his soul,
 Perception brooded unexpressed and whole.
 A healthy spirit like a healthy frame
 Craves aliment in plenty — all the same,
 Changes, assimilates its aliment.
 Perceived Sordello, on a truth intent?
 Next day no formularies more you saw
 Than figs or olives in a sated maw.
 ’T is Knowledge, whither such perceptions tend;
 They lose themselves in that, means to an end,
 The many old producing some one new,
 A last unlike the first. If lies are true,
 The Caliph’s wheel-work man of brass receives
 A meal, munched millet grains and lettuce leaves
 Together in his stomach rattle loose —
 You find them perfect next day to produce;
 But ne’er expect the man, on strength of that,
 Can roll an iron camel-collar flat
 Like Haroun’s self! I tell you, what was stored

Bit by bit through Sordello's life, outpoured
 That eve, was, for that age, a novel thing:
 And round those three the people formed a ring,
 Of visionary judges whose award
 He recognized in full — faces that barred
 Henceforth return to the old careless life,
 In whose great presence, therefore, his first strife
 For their sake must not be ignobly fought.
 All these, for once, approved of him, he thought,
 Suspended their own vengeance, chose await
 The issue of this strife to reinstate
 Them in the right of taking it — in fact
 He must be proved king ere they could exact
 Vengeance for such king's defalcation. Last,
 A reason why the phrases flowed so fast
 Was in his quite forgetting for a time
 Himself in his amazement that the rhyme
 Disguised the royalty so much: he there —
 And Salinguerra — and yet unaware
 Who was the lord, who liegeman!

“Thus I lay

On thine my spirit and compel obey
 His lord, — my liegeman, — impotent to build
 Another Rome, but hardly so unskilled
 In what such builder should have been, as brook
 One shame beyond the charge that I forsook
 His function! Free me from that shame, I bend
 A brow before, suppose new years to spend,
 Allow each chance, nor fruitlessly, recur —

Measure thee with the Minstrel, then, demur
 At any crown he claims ! That I must cede
 Shamed now, my right to my especial meed —
 Confess thee fitter help the world than I
 Ordained its champion from eternity,
 Is much : but to behold thee scorn the post
 I quit in thy behalf — to hear thee boast
 What makes my own despair !” And while he rung
 The changes on this theme, the roof up-sprung,
 The sad walls of the presence-chamber died
 Into the distance, or embowering vied
 With far-away Goito's vine-frontier ;
 And crowds of faces — (only keeping clear
 The rose-light in the midst, his vantage-ground
 To fight their battle from) — deep clustered round
 Sordello, with good wishes no mere breath,
 Kind prayers for him no vapor, since, come death,
 Come life, he was fresh-sinewed every joint,
 Each bone new-marrowed as whom Gods anoint
 Though mortal to their rescue : now let sprawl
 The snaky volumes hither ! Is Typhon all
 For Hercules to trample — good report
 From Salinguerra only to extort ?
 “ So was I ” (closed he his inculcating,
 A poet must be earth's essential king)
 “ So was I, royal so, and if I fail,
 'T is not the royalty, ye witness quail,
 But one deposed who, caring not exert
 Its proper essence, trifled malapert

With accidents instead — good things assigned
 As heralds of a better thing behind —
 And, worthy through display of these, put forth
 Never the inmost all-surpassing worth
 That constitutes him King precisely since
 As yet no other spirit may evince
 Its like : the power he took most pride to test,
 Whereby all forms of life had been professed
 At pleasure, forms already on the earth,
 Was but a means to power beyond, whose birth
 Should, in its novelty, be kingship's proof.
 Now, whether he came near or kept aloof
 The several forms he longed to imitate,
 Not there the kingship lay, he sees too late.
 Those forms, unalterable first as last,
 Proved him her copier, not the protoplast
 Of nature : what could come of being free
 By action to exhibit tree for tree,
 Bird, beast, for beast and bird, or prove earth bore
 One veritable man or woman more ?
 Means to an end, such proofs are : what the end ?
 Let essence, whatsoe'er it be, extend —
 Never contract ! Already you include
 The multitude ; then let the multitude
 Include yourself ; and the result were new :
 Themselves before, the multitude turn you.
 This were to live and move and have, in them,
 Your being, and secure a diadem
 You should transmit (because no cycle yearns

Beyond itself, but on itself returns)
 When, the full sphere in wane, the world o'erlaid
 Long since with you, shall have in turn obeyed
 Some orb still prouder, some displayer, still
 More potent than the last, of human will,
 And some new King depose the old. Of such
 Am I — whom pride of this elates too much?
 Safe, rather say, 'mid troops of peers again;
 I, with my words, hailed brother of the train
 Deeds once sufficed: for, let the world roll back,
 Who fails, through deeds howe'er diverse, re-track
 My purpose still, my task? A teeming crust —
 Air, flame, earth, wave at conflict! Then, needs must
 Emerge some Calm embodied, these refer
 The brawl to; — yellow-bearded Jupiter?
 No! Saturn; some existence like a pact
 And protest against Chaos, some first fact
 I' the faint of time. My deep of life, I know,
 Is unavailing e'en to poorly show" . . .
 (For here the Chief immeasurably yawned)
 . . . "Deeds in their due gradation till Song dawned —
 The fullest effluence of the finest mind,
 All in degree, no way diverse in kind
 From minds about it, minds which, more or less
 Lofty or low, move seeking to impress
 Themselves on somewhat; but one mind has climbed
 Step after step, by just ascent sublimed.
 Thought is the soul of act, and, stage by stage,
 Is soul from body still to disengage

As tending to a freedom which rejects
 Such help and incorporeally affects
 The world, producing deeds but not by deeds,
 Swaying, in others, frames itself exceeds,
 Assigning them the simpler tasks it used
 To patiently perform till Song produced
 Acts, by thoughts only, for the mind: divest
 Mind of e'en Thought, and, lo, God's unexpressed
 Will dawns above us! All then is to win
 Save that! How much for me, then? where begin
 My work? About me, faces! and they flock,
 The earnest faces! What shall I unlock
 By song? behold me prompt, whate'er it be,
 To minister: how much can mortals see
 Of Life? No more than so? I take the task
 And marshal you Life's elemental masque,
 Show Men, on evil or on good lay stress,
 This light, this shade make prominent, suppress
 All ordinary hues that softening blend
 Such natures with the level. Apprehend
 Which sinner is, which saint, if I allot
 Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, a blaze or blot,
 To those you doubt concerning! I enwomb
 Some wretched Friedrich with his red-hot tomb;
 Some dubious spirit, Lombard Agilulph
 With the black chastening river I engulph;
 Some unapproached Matilda I enshrine
 With languors of the planet of decline —
 These, fail to recognize, to arbitrate

Between henceforth, to rightly estimate
 Thus marshalled in the masque! Myself, the while,
 As one of you, am witness, shrink or smile
 At my own showing! Next age — what's to do?
 The men and women stationed hitherto
 Will I unstation, good and bad, conduct
 Each nature to its farthest, or obstruct
 At soonest, in the world: light, thwarted, breaks
 A limpid purity to rainbow flakes,
 Or shadow, massed, freezes to gloom: behold
 How such, with fit assistance to unfold,
 Or obstacles to crush them, disengage
 Their forms, love, hate, hope, fear, peace make, war wage,
 In presence of you all! Myself, implied
 Superior now, as, by the platform's side,
 I bade them do and suffer, — would last content
 The world . . . no — that's too far! I circumvent
 A few, my masque contented, and to these
 Offer unveil the last of mysteries —
 Man's inmost life shall have yet freer play:
 Once more I cast external things away,
 And natures composite, so decompose
 That" . . . Why, he writes *Sordello*!

“How I rose,

And how have you advanced! since evermore
 Yourselves effect what I was fain before
 Effect, what I supplied yourselves suggest,
 What I leave bare yourselves can now invest.
 How we attain to talk as brothers talk,

In half-words, call things by half-names, no balk
 From discontinuing old aids. To-day
 Takes in account the work of Yesterday :
 Has not the world a Past now, its adept
 Consults ere he dispense with or accept
 New aids ? a single touch more may enhance,
 A touch less turn to insignificance
 Those structures' symmetry the Past has strewed
 The world with, once so bare. Leave the mere rude
 Explicit details ! 't is but brother's speech
 We need, speech where an accent's change gives each
 The other's soul — no speech to understand
 By former audience : need was then to expand,
 Expatriate — hardly were we brothers ! true —
 Nor I lament my small remove from you,
 Nor reconstruct what stands already. Ends
 Accomplished turn to means : my art intends
 New structure from the ancient : as they changed
 The spoils of every clime at Venice, ranged
 The horned and snouted Libyan god, upright
 As in his desert, by some simple bright
 Clay cinerary pitcher — Thebes as Rome,
 Athens as Byzant rifled, till their Dome
 From earth's reputed consummations razed
 A seal, the all-transmuting Triad blazed
 Above. Ah, whose that fortune ? ne'ertheless
 E'en he must stoop contented to express
 No tithe of what's to say — the vehicle
 Never sufficient : but his work is still

For faces like the faces that select
 The single service I am bound effect,
 And bid me cast aside such fancies, bow
 Taurello to the Guelf cause, disallow
 The Kaiser's coming — which with heart, soul, strength,
 I labor for, this eve, who feel at length
 My past career's outrageous vanity,
 And would, as it amends, die, even die
 Now I first estimate the boon of life,
 If death might win compliance — sure, this strife
 Is right for once — the People my support."

My poor Sordello! what may we extort
 By this, I wonder? Palma's lighted eyes
 Turned to Taurello who, long past surprise,
 Began, "You love him — what you'd say at large
 Let me say briefly. First, your father's charge
 To me, his friend, peruse: I guessed indeed
 You were no stranger to the course decreed.
 He bids me leave his children to the saints:
 As for a certain project, he acquaints
 The Pope with that, and offers him the best
 Of your possessions to permit the rest
 Go peaceably — to Ecelin, a stripe
 Of soil the cursed Vicentines will gripe,
 — To Alberic, a patch the Trevisan
 Clutches already; extricate, who can,
 Treville, Villarazzi, Puissolo,
 Cartiglione, Loria! — all go,
 And with them go my hopes. 'T is lost, then! Lost

This eve, our crisis, and some pains it cost
 Procuring ; thirty years — as good I'd spent
 Like our admonisher ! But each his bent
 Pursues : no question, one might live absurd
 One's self this while, by deed as he by word,
 Persisting to obtrude an influence where
 'Tis made account of, much as . . . nay, you fare
 With twice the fortune, youngster ! — I submit,
 Happy to parallel my waste of wit
 With the renowned Sordello's : you decide
 A course for me. Romano may abide
 Romano, — Bacchus ! After all, what dearth
 Of Ecelins and Alberics on earth ?
 Say there's a prize in prospect, must disgrace
 Betide competitors, unless they style
 Themselves Romano ? were it worth my while
 To try my own luck ! But an obscure place
 Suits me — there wants a youth to bustle, stalk
 And attitudinize — some fight, more talk,
 Most flaunting badges — how, I might make clear,
 Since Friedrich's very purposes lie here
 — Here, pity they are like to lie ! For me,
 With station fixed unceremoniously
 Long since, small use contesting ; I am but
 The liegeman, you are born the lieges — shut
 That gentle mouth now ! or resume your kin
 In your sweet self ; were Palma Ecelin
 For me to work with ! Could that neck endure
 This bauble for a cumbrous garniture,

She should . . . or might one bear it for her? Stay —
 I have not been so flattered many a day
 As by your pale friend — Bacchus! The least help
 Would lick the hind's fawn to a lion's whelp —
 His neck is broad enough — a ready tongue
 Beside — too writhled — but, the main thing, young —
 I could . . . why, look ye!"

And the badge was thrown
 Across Sordello's neck: "This badge alone
 Makes you Romano's Head — becomes superb
 On your bare neck, which would, on mine, disturb
 The pauldron," said Taurello. A mad act,
 Not even dreamed about before — in fact,
 Not when his sportive arm rose for the nonce —
 But he had dallied overmuch, this once,
 With power: the thing was done, and he, aware
 The thing was done, proceeded to declare —
 (So like a nature made to serve, excel
 In serving, only feel by service well!)
 — That he would make Sordello that and more.
 "As good a scheme as any! What's to pore
 At in my face?" he asked — ponder instead
 This piece of news; you are Romano's Head!
 One cannot slacken pace so near the goal,
 Suffer my Azzo to escape heart-whole
 This time! For you there's Palma to espouse —
 For me, one crowning trouble ere I house
 Like my compeer."

On which ensued a strange

And solemn visitation ; there came change
 O'er every one of them ; each looked on each :
 Up in the midst a truth grew, without speech.
 And when the giddiness sank and the haze
 Subsided, they were sitting, no amaze,
 Sordello with the baldric on, his sire
 Silent, though his proportions seemed aspire
 Momently ; and, interpreting the thrill
 Nigh at its ebb, Palma was found there still
 Relating somewhat Adelaide confessed
 A year ago, while dying on her breast, —
 Of a contrivance that Vicenza night,
 When Ecelin had birth. “ Their convoy's flight,
 Cut off a moment, coiled inside the flame
 That wallowed like a dragon at his game
 The toppling city through — San Biagio rocks !
 And wounded lies in her delicious locks
 Retrude, the frail mother, on her face,
 None of her wasted, just in one embrace
 Covering her child : when, as they lifted her,
 Cleaving the tumult, mighty, mightier
 And mightiest Taurello's cry outbroke,
 Leapt like a tongue of fire that cleaves the smoke,
 Midmost to cheer his Mantuans onward — drown
 His colleague Ecelin's clamor, up and down
 The disarray : failed Adelaide see then
 Who was the natural chief, the man of men ?
 Outstripping time, her infant there burst swathe,
 Stood up with eyes haggard beyond the scathe

From wandering after his heritage
 Lost once and lost for aye — and why that rage,
 That deprecating glance? A new shape leant
 On a familiar shape — gloatingly bent
 O'er his discomfiture ; 'mid wreaths it wore,
 Still one outflamed the rest — her child's before
 'T was Salinguerra's for his child : scorn, hate
 Rage, startled her from Ecelin — too late !
 Then was the moment ! rival's foot had spurned
 Never that brow to earth ! Ere sense returned —
 The act conceived, adventured, and complete,
 They bore away to an obscure retreat
 Mother and child — Retrude's self not slain ”
 (Nor even here Taurello moved) “ though pain
 Was fled ; and what assured them most 't was fled,
 All pain, was, if they raised the pale hushed head
 'T would turn this way and that, waver awhile,
 And only settle into its old smile —
 (Graceful as the disquieted water-flag
 Steadying itself, remarked they, in the quag
 On either side their path) — when suffered look
 Down on her child. They marched : no sign once shook
 The company's close litter of crossed spears
 Till, as they reached Goito, a few tears
 Slipt in the sunset from her long black lash,
 And she was gone. So far the action rash —
 No crime. They laid Retrude in the font,
 Taurello's very gift, her child was wont
 To sit beneath — constant as eve he came

To sit by its attendant girls the same
 As one of them. For Palma, she would blend
 With this magnific spirit to the end,
 That ruled her first — but scarcely had she dared
 To disobey the Adelaide who scared
 Her into vowing never to disclose
 A secret to her husband, which so froze
 His blood at half recital, she contrived
 To hide from him Taurello's infant lived,
 Lest, by revealing that, himself should mar
 Romano's fortunes. And, a crime so far,
 Palma received that action: she was told
 Of Salinguerra's nature, of his cold
 Calm acquiescence in his lot! But free
 To impart the secret to Romano, she
 Engaged to repossess Sordello of
 His heritage, and hers, and that way doff
 The mask, but after years, long years! — while now,
 Was not Romano's sign-mark on that brow?"

Across Taurello's heart his arms were locked:
 And when he did speak 't was as if he mocked
 The minstrel, "who had not to move," he said,
 "Not stir — should Fate defraud him of a shred
 Of his son's infancy? much less of his youth!"
 (Laughingly all this) — "which to aid, in truth,
 Himself, reserved on purpose, had not grown
 Old, not too old — 't was best they kept alone
 Till now, and never idly met till now";
 — Then, in the same breath, told Sordello how

All intimations of this eve's event
 Were lies, for Friedrich must advance to Trent,
 Thence to Verona, then to Rome, there stop,
 Tumble the Church down, institute a-top
 The Alps a Prefecture of Lombardy :
 — "That 's now ! — no prophesying what may be
 Anon, with a new monarch of the clime,
 Native of Gesi, passing his youth's prime
 At Naples. Tito bids my choice decide
 On whom . . ."

"Embrace him, madman !" Palma cried,
 Who through the laugh saw sweatdrops burst apace,
 And his lips' blanching : he did not embrace
 Sordello, but he laid Sordello's hand
 On his own eyes, mouth, forehead.

Understand,
 This while Sordello was becoming flushed
 Out of his whiteness : thoughts rushed, fancies rushed ;
 He pressed his hand upon his head and signed
 Both should forbear him. "Nay, the best 's behind !"
 Taurello laughed, — not quite with the same laugh :
 "The truth is, thus we scatter, ay, like chaff
 These Guelfs, a despicable monk recoils
 From : nor expect a fickle Kaiser spoils
 Our triumph ! — Friedrich ? Think you, I intend
 Friedrich shall reap the fruits of blood I spend
 And brain I waste ? Think you, the people clap
 Their hands at my out-hewing this wild gap
 For any Friedrich to fill up ? 'T is mine —

That's yours: I tell you, towards some such design
Have I worked blindly, yes, and idly, yes,
And for another, yes — but worked no less
With instinct at my heart; I else had swerved,
While now — look round! My cunning has preserved
Samminiato — that's a central place
Secures us Florence, boy, — in Pisa's case,
By land as she by sea; with Pisa ours,
And Florence, and Pistoia, one devours
The land at leisure! Gloriously dispersed —
Brescia, observe, Milan, Piacenza first
That flanked us (ah, you know not!) in the March;
On these we pile, as keystone of our arch,
Romagna and Bologna, whose first span
Covered the Trentine and the Valsugan;
Sofia's Eгна by Bolgiano's sure!" . . .
So he proceeded: half of all this, pure
Delusion, doubtless, nor the rest too true,
But what was undone he felt sure to do,
As ring by ring he wrung off, flung away
The pauldron-rings to give his sword-arm play —
Need of the sword now! That would soon adjust
Aught wrong at present; to the sword intrust
Sordello's whiteness, undersize: 't was plain
He hardly rendered right to his own brain —
Like a brave hound, men educate to pride
Himself on speed or scent nor aught beside,
As though he could not, gift by gift, match men!
Palma had listened patiently: but when

'T was time expostulate, attempt withdraw
 Taurello from his child, she, without awe
 Took off his iron arms from, one by one,
 Sordello's shrinking shoulders, and, that done,
 Made him avert his visage and relieve
 Sordello (you might see his corselet heave
 The while) who, loose, rose — tried to speak, then sank :
 They left him in the chamber. All was blank.

And even reeling down the narrow stair
 Taurello kept up, as though unaware
 Palma was by to guide him, the old device
 — Something of Milan — “how we muster thrice
 The Torriani's strength there — all along
 Our own Visconti cowed them” — thus the song
 Continued even while she bade him stoop,
 Thrid somehow, by some glimpse of arrow-loop,
 The turnings to the gallery below,
 Where he stopped short as Palma let him go.
 When he had sat in silence long enough
 Splintering the stone bench, braving a rebuff
 She stopt the truncheon ; only to commence
 One of Sordello's poems, a pretence
 For speaking, some poor rhyme of “Elys' hair
 And head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,
 So smooth and close are laid the few fine locks
 Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
 Sun-blanced the livelong Summer” — from his worst
 Performance, the Goito, as his first :
 And that at end, conceiving from the brow

And open mouth no silence would serve now,
 Went on to say the whole world loved that man
 And, for that matter, thought his face, tho' wan,
 Eclipsed the Count's — he sucking in each phrase
 As if an angel spoke. The foolish praise
 Ended, he drew her on his mailed knees, made
 Her face a framework with his hands, a shade,
 A crown, an aureole : there must she remain
 (Her little mouth compressed with smiling pain
 As in his gloves she felt her tresses twitch)
 To get the best look at, in fittest niche
 Dispose his saint. That done, he kissed her brow,
 — "Lauded her father for his treason now,"
 He told her, "only, how could one suspect
 The wit in him ? — whose clansman, recollect,
 Was ever Salinguerra — she, the same,
 Romano and his lady — so, might claim
 To know all, as she should" — and thus begun
 Schemes with a vengeance, schemes on schemes, "not one
 Fit to be told that foolish boy," he said,
 "But only let Sordello Palma wed,
 — Then !"

'T was a dim long narrow place at best :
 Midway a sole grate showed the fiery West,
 As shows its corpse the world's end some split tomb —
 A gloom, a rift of fire, another gloom,
 Faced Palma — but at length Taurello set
 Her free ; the grating held one ragged jet
 Of fierce gold fire : he lifted her within

The hollow underneath — how else begin
 Fate's second marvellous cycle, else renew
 The ages than with Palma plain in view ?
 Then paced the passage, hands clenched, head erect,
 Pursuing his discourse ; a grand unchecked
 Monotony made out from his quick talk
 And the recurring noises of his walk ;
 — Somewhat too much like the o'ercharged assent
 Of two resolved friends in one danger blent,
 Who hearten each the other against heart —
 Boasting there 's naught to care for, when, apart
 The boaster, all 's to care for. He, beside
 Some shape not visible, in power and pride
 Approached, out of the dark, ginglyingly near,
 Nearer, passed close in the broad light, his ear
 Crimson, eyeballs suffused, temples full-fraught,
 Just a snatch of the rapid speech you caught,
 And on he strode into the opposite dark
 Till presently the harsh heel's turn, a spark
 I' the stone, and whirl of some loose embossed thong
 That crashed against the angle aye so long
 After the last, punctual to an amount
 Of mailed great paces you could not but count, —
 Prepared you for the pacing back again.
 And by the snatches you might ascertain
 That, Friedrich's Prefecture surmounted, left
 By this alone in Italy, they cleft
 Asunder, crushed together, at command
 Of none, were free to break up Hildebrand,

Rebuild, he and Sordello, Charlemagne —
 But garnished, Strength with Knowledge, “if we deign
 Accept that compromise and stoop to give
 Rome law, the Cæsars’ Representative.”
 — Enough, that the illimitable flood
 Of triumphs after triumphs, understood
 In its faint reflux (you shall hear) sufficed
 Young Ecelin for appanage, enticed
 Him on till, these long quiet in their graves,
 He found ’t was looked for that a whole life’s braves
 Should somehow be made good — so, weak and worn,
 Must stagger up at Milan, one gray morn
 Of the To-Come, and fight his latest fight.
 But, Salinguerra’s prophecy at height —
 He voluble with a raised arm and stiff,
 A blaring voice, a blazing eye, as if
 He had our very Italy to keep
 Or cast away, or gather in a heap
 To garrison the better — ay, his word
 Was, “run the cucumber into a gourd,
 Drive Trent upon Apulia” — at their pitch
 Who spied the continents and islands which
 Grew mulberry-leaves and sickles, in the map —
 (Strange that three such confessions so should hap
 To Palma, Dante spoke with in the clear
 Amorous silence of the Swooning-sphere, —
Cunizza, as he called her! Never ask
 Of Palma more! She sat, knowing her task
 Was done, the labor of it — for, success,

Concerned not Palma, passion's votaries)
 Triumph at height, and thus Sordello crowned —
 Above the passage suddenly a sound
 Stops speech, stops walk: back shrinks Taurello, bids
 With large involuntary asking lids,
 Palma interpret. " 'T is his own foot-stamp —
 Your hand! His summons! Nay, this idle damp
 Befits not!" Out they two reeled dizzily.
 "Visconti's strong at Milan," resumed he,
 In the old, somewhat insignificant way —
 (Was Palma wont, years afterward, to say)
 As though the spirit's flight, sustained thus far,
 Dropped at that very instant. Gone they are —
 Palma, Taurello; Eglamor anon,
 Ecelin, — only Naddo's never gone!
 — Labors, this moonrise, what the Master meant
 "Is Squarcialupo speckled? — purulent,
 I'd say, but when was Providence put out?
 He carries somehow handily about
 His spite nor fouls himself!" Goito's vines
 Stand like a cheat detected — stark rough lines,
 The moon breaks through, a gray mean scale against
 The vault where, this eve's Maiden, thou remain'st
 Like some fresh martyr, eyes fixed — who can tell?
 As Heaven, now all's at end, did not so well,
 Spite of the faith and victory, to leave
 Its virgin quite to death in the lone eve.
 While the persisting hermit-bee . . . ha! wait
 No longer — these in compass, forward fate!

BOOK THE SIXTH.

AT THE CLOSE OF A DAY OR A LIFE,

THE thought of Eglamor's least like a thought,
And yet a false one, was, "Man shrinks to naught
If matched with symbols of immensity —
Must quail, forsooth, before a quiet sky
Or sea, too little for their quietude":
And, truly, somewhat in Sordello's mood
Confirmed its speciousness, while eve slow sank
Down the near terrace to the farther bank,
And only one spot left out of the night
Glimmered upon the river opposite —
A breadth of watery heaven like a bay,
A sky-like space of water, ray for ray,
And star for star, one richness where they mixed
As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,
Tumultuary splendors folded in
To die. Nor turned he till Ferrara's din
(Say, the monotonous speech from a man's lip
Who lets some first and eager purpose slip
In a new fancy's birth; the speech keeps on
Though elsewhere its informing soul be gone)
— Aroused him, — surely offered succor. Fate
Paused with this eve; ere she precipitate
Herself, — put off strange after-thoughts awhile,
That voice, those large hands, that portentous smile, —

What help to pierce the Future as the Past,
Lay in the plaining city ?

And at last

The main discovery and prime concern,
All that just now imported him to learn,
His truth, like yonder slow moon to complete
Heaven, rose again, and, naked at his feet,
Lighted his old life's every shift and change,
Effort with counter-effort ; nor the range
Of each looked wrong except wherein it checked,
Some other — which of these could he suspect,
Prying into them by the sudden blaze ?
The real way seemed made up of all the ways —
Mood after mood of the one mind in him ;
Tokens of the existence, bright or dim,
Of a transcendent all-embracing sense
Demanding only outward influence,
A soul, in Palma's phrase, above his soul,
Power to uplift his power, — this moon's control,
Over the sea-depths, — and their mass had swept
Onward from the beginning and still kept
Its course : but years and years the sky above
Held none, and so, untasked of any love,
His sensitiveness idled, now amorn,
Alive now, and to sullenness or sport
Given wholly up, disposed itself anew
At every passing instigation, grew
And dwindled at caprice, in foam-showers spilt,
Wedge-like insisting, quivered now a gilt

Shield in the sunshine, now a blinding race
 Of whitest ripples o'er the reef— found place
 For much display ; not gathered up and, hurled
 Right from its heart, encompassing the world.
 So had Sordello been, by consequence,
 Without a function : others made pretence
 To strength not half his own, yet had some core
 Within, submitted to some moon, before
 Them still, superior still whate'er their force, —
 Were able therefore to fulfil a course,
 Nor missed life's crown, authentic attribute.
 To each who lives must be a certain fruit
 Of having lived in his degree, — a stage,
 Earlier or later in men's pilgrimage,
 To stop at ; and to this the spirits tend
 Who, still discovering beauty without end,
 Amass the scintillations, make one star
 — Something unlike them, self-sustained, afar, —
 And meanwhile nurse the dream of being blest
 By winning it to notice and invest
 Their souls with alien glory, some one day
 Whene'er the nucleus, gathering shape alway,
 Round to the perfect circle — soon or late,
 According as themselves are formed to wait ;
 Whether mere human beauty will suffice
 — The yellow hair and the luxurious eyes,
 Or human intellect seem best, or each
 Combine in some ideal form past reach
 On earth, or else some shade of these, some aim,

Some love, hate even, take their place, the same,
 And may be served — all this they do not lose,
 Waiting for death to live, nor idly choose
 What must be Hell — a progress thus pursued
 Through all existence, still above the food
 That 's offered them, still towering beyond
 The widened range, in virtue of their bond
 Of sovereignty. Not that a Palma's Love,
 A Salinguerra's Hate, would equal prove
 To swaying all Sordello: wherefore doubt,
 That Love meet for such Strength, some moon without
 Would match his sea? — or fear, Good manifest,
 Only the Best breaks faith? — Ah, but the Best
 Somehow eludes us ever, still might be
 And is not! crave we gems? no penury
 Of their material round us! pliant earth,
 The plastic flame — what balks the mage his birth
 — Jacynth in balls, or lodestone by the block?
 Flinders enrich the strand, and veins the rock —
 Naught more! Ask creatures? Life 's i' the tempest,
 Thought

Clothes the keen hill-top, midday woods are fraught
 With fervors: ah, these forms are well enough!
 But we had hoped, encouraged by the stuff
 Profuse at Nature's pleasure, men beyond
 These men! and thus, perchance, are over-fond
 In arguing, from Good the Best, from force
 Divided — force combined, an ocean's course
 From this our sea whose mere intestine pants

Might seem at times sufficient to our wants.
 — External Power? If none be adequate
 And he stand forth ordained (a prouder fate)
 A law to his own sphere? — need to remove
 All incompleteness, for that law, that love?
 Nay, if all other laws be such, though veiled
 In mercy to each vision that had failed
 If unassisted by its want, — for lure,
 Embodied? Stronger vision could endure
 The unbodied want: no bauble for a truth!
 The People were himself; and, by the ruth
 At their condition, was he less impelled
 To alter the discrepancy beheld,
 Than if, from the sound Whole, a sickly Part
 Subtracted were transformed, decked out with art,
 Then palmed on him as alien woe — the Guelf
 To succor, proud that he forsook himself?
 No! All's himself; all service, therefore, rates
 Alike, nor serving one part, immolates
 The rest: but all in time! “That lance of yours
 Makes havoc soon with Malek and his Moors,
 That buckler's lined with many a giant's beard
 Ere long, O champion, be the lance upreared,
 The buckler wielded handsomely as now!
 But view your escort, bear in mind your vow,
 Count the pale tracts of sand to pass ere that,
 And, if you hope we struggle through the flat,
 Put lance and buckler by! Next half-month lacks
 Mere sturdy exercise of mace and axe

To cleave this dismal brake of prickly-pear
 Which bristling holds Cydippe by the hair,
 Lames barefoot Agathon : this felled, we 'll try
 The picturesque achievements by and by —
 Next life !”

Ay, rally, mock, O People, urge
 Your claims ! — for thus he ventured, to the verge,
 Push a vain mummary which perchance distrust
 Of his fast-slipping resolution thrust
 Likewise : accordingly the Crowd — as yet
 He had unconsciously contrived forget
 I' the whole, to dwell o' the points . . . one might
 assuage

The signal horrors easier than engage
 With a dim vulgar vast unobvious grief
 Not to be fancied off, nor gained relief
 In brilliant fits, cured by a happy quirk,
 But by dim vulgar vast unobvious work
 To correspond . . . this Crowd then, forth they stood.
 “ And now content thy stronger vision, brood
 On thy bare want ; uncovered, turf by turf,
 Study the corpse-face thro' the taint-worms' scurf !”

Down sank the People's Then ; uprose their Now.
 These sad ones render service to ! And how
 Piteously little must that service prove
 — Had surely proved in any case ! for, move
 Each other obstacle away, let youth
 Have been aware it had surprised a truth
 'T were service to impart — can truth be seized,

Settled forthwith, and, of the captive eased,
 Its captor find fresh prey, since this alit
 So happily, no gesture luring it,
 The earnest of a flock to follow? Vain,
 Most vain! a life's to spend ere this he chain,
 To the poor crowd's complacence; ere the crowd
 Pronounce it captured, he descries a cloud
 Its kin of twice the plume — which he, in turn,
 If he shall live as many lives, may learn
 How to secure — not else. Then Mantua called
 Back to his mind how certain bards were thrall'd
 — Buds blasted, but of breath more like perfume
 Than Naddo's staring nosegay's carrion bloom:
 Some insane rose that burnt heart out in sweets,
 A spendthrift in the Spring, no Summer greets —
 Some Dularete, drunk with truths and wine,
 Grown bestial, dreaming how become divine.
 "Yet to surmount this obstacle, commence
 With the commencement, merits crowning! Hence
 Must truth be casual truth, elicited
 In sparks so mean, at intervals dispread
 So rarely, that 't is like at no one time
 Of the world's story has not truth, the prime
 Of truth, the very truth which, loosed, had hurled
 The world's course right, been really in the world
 — Content the while with some mean spark by dint
 Of some chance-blow, the solitary hint
 Of buried fire, which, rip its breast, would stream
 Sky-ward!"

Sordello's miserable gleam
 Was looked for at the moment: he would dash
 This badge, and all it brought, to earth, — abash
 Taurello thus, perhaps persuade him wrest
 The Kaiser from his purpose, — would attest
 His own belief, in any case. Before
 He dashes it, however, think once more!
 For, were that little, truly service? “Ay —
 I' the end, no doubt; but meantime? Plain you spy
 Its ultimate effect, but many flaws
 Of vision blur each intervening cause.
 Were the day's fraction clear as the life's sum
 Of service, Now as filled as the To-come
 With evidence of good — nor too minute
 A share to vie with evil! No dispute,
 'T were fitliest maintain the Guelfs in rule:
 That makes your life's work: but you have to school
 Your day's work on these natures circumstanced
 Thus variously, which yet, as each advanced
 Or might impede the Guelf rule, must be moved
 Now, for the Then's sake, — hating what you loved,
 Loving old hatreds! nor if one man bore
 Brand upon temples while his fellow wore
 The aureole, would it task you to decide —
 But, portioned duly out, the Future vied
 Never with the unparcelled Present! Smite
 Or spare so much on warrant all so slight?
 The Present's complete sympathies to break,
 Aversions bear with, for a Future's sake

So feeble? Tito ruined through one speck,
 The Legate saved by his sole lightish fleck?
 This were work, true — but work performed at cost
 Of other work — aught gained here, elsewhere lost.
 For a new segment spoil an orb half done?
 Rise with the People one step, and sink — one?
 Were it but one step — less than the whole face
 Of things, your novel duty bids erase!
 Harms to abolish! what? the prophet saith,
 The minstrel singeth vainly then? Old faith,
 Old courage, only born because of harms,
 Were not, from highest to the lowest, charms?
 Flame may persist but is not glare as stanch?
 Where the salt marshes stagnate, crystals branch —
 Blood dries to crimson — Evil's beautified
 In every shape. Thrust Beauty then aside
 And banish Evil! wherefore? After all,
 Is Evil a result less natural
 Than Good? For, overlook the seasons' strife
 With tree and flower, — the hideous animal life,
 (Of which who seeks shall find a grinning taunt
 For his solution, and endure the vaunt
 Of nature's angel, as a child that knows
 Himself befooled, unable to propose
 Aught better than the fooling) — and but care
 For Men, for the mere People then and there, —
 In these, could you but see that Good and Ill
 Claimed you alike! Whence rose their claim but still
 From Ill, as fruit of Ill — what else could knit

You theirs but Sorrow? Any free from it
 Were also free from you! Whose happiness
 Could be distinguished in this morning's press
 Of miseries? — the fool's who passed a gibe
 'On thee,' jeered he, 'so wedded to thy tribe,
 Thou carriest green and yellow tokens in
 Thy very face that thou art Ghibellin!' —
 Much hold on you that fool obtained! Nay mount
 Yet higher — and upon men's own account
 Must Evil stay: for, what is Joy? — to heave
 Up one obstruction more, and common leave
 What was peculiar — by such act destroy
 Itself; a partial death is every joy;
 The sensible escape, enfranchisement
 Of a sphere's essence: once the vexed — content,
 The cramped — at large, the growing circle — round,
 All's to begin again — some novel bound
 To break, some new enlargement to entreat,
 The sphere though larger is not more complete.
 Now for Mankind's experience: who alone
 Might style the unobstructed world his own?
 Whom palled Goito with its perfect things?
 Sordello's self! whereas for mankind springs
 Salvation by each hindrance interposed;
 They climb, life's view is not at once disclosed
 To creatures caught up, on its summit left,
 Heaven plain above them, yet of wings bereft —
 But lower laid, as at the mountain's foot,
 While, range on range, the girdling forests shoot

'Twixt your plain prospect and the throngs who scale
Height after height, and pierce mists, veil by veil,
Heartened with each discovery ; in their soul,
The Whole they seek by Parts — but, found that Whole,
Could they revert, enjoy past gains? The space
Of time you judge so meagre to embrace
The Parts, were more than plenty, once attained
The Whole, to quite exhaust it: naught were gained
But leave to look — not leave to do ; Beneath
Soon sates the looker — look Above, and Death
Tempts ere a tithe of Life be tasted. Live
First, and die soon enough, Sordello ! Give
Body and spirit the first right they claim,
And pasture thee on a voluptuous shame
That thou, a pageant-city's denizen,
Art neither vilely lodged midst Lombard men —
Canst force joy out of sorrow, seem to truck
Thine attributes away for sordid muck,
Yet manage from that very muck educe
Gold ; then subject, nor scruple, to thy cruce
The world's discardings ! Though real ingots pay
Thy pains, the clods that yielded them are clay
To all save thee, — would clay remain, though quenched
Thy purging-fire ; who 's robbed then? Had you
wrenched
An ampler treasure forth ! — As 't is, they crave
A share that ruins you and will not save
Them. Why should sympathy command you quit
The course that makes your joy, nor will remit

Their woe? Would all arrive at joy? Reverse
 The order (time instructs you) nor coerce
 Each unit till, some predetermined mode,
 The total be emancipate; men's road
 Is one, men's times of travel many; thwart
 No enterprising soul's precocious start
 Before the general march! if slow or fast
 All straggle up to the same point at last,
 Why grudge your having gained, a month ago,
 The brakes at balm-shed, asphodels in blow,
 While they were landlocked? Speed there Then, but how
 This badge would suffer you improve your Now!'"

His time of action for, against, or with
 Our world (I labor to extract the pith
 Of this his problem) grew, that even-tide,
 Gigantic with its power of joy, beside
 The world's eternity of impotence
 To profit though at his whole joy's expense.
 \Make nothing of my day because so brief?
 Rather make more — instead of joy, use grief
 Before its novelty have time subside! \.
 Wait not for the late savour — leave untried
 Virtue, the creaming honey-wine, quick squeeze
 Vice like a biting spirit from the lees
 Of life! — together let wrath, hatred, lust,
 All tyrannies in every shape, be thrust
 Upon this Now, which time may reason out
 As mischiefs, far from benefits, no doubt —
 But long ere then Sordello will have slept

Away — you teach him at Goito's crypt,
 There's a blank issue to that fiery thrill!
 Stirring, the few cope with the many, still:
 So much of sand as, quiet, makes a mass
 Unable to produce three tufts of grass,
 Shall, troubled by the whirlwind, render void
 The whole calm glebe's endeavor: be employed!
 And e'en though somewhat smart the Crowd for this,
 Contribute each his pang to make your bliss,
 'Tis but one pang — one blood-drop to the bowl
 Which brimful tempts the sluggish asp uncowl
 At last, stains ruddily the dull red cape,
 And, kindling orbs gray as the unripe grape
 Before, avails forthwith to disentrance
 The portent — soon to lead a mystic dance
 Among you! For, who sits alone in Rome?
 Have those great hands indeed hewn out a home,
 And set me there to live? O life, life-breath,
 Life-blood, — ere sleep, come travail, life ere death!
 This life stream on my soul, direct, oblique,
 But always streaming! Hindrances? They pique —
 Helps? such . . . but why repeat, my soul o'ertops
 Each height, than every depth profoundlier drops?
 Enough that I can live, and would live! Wait
 For some transcendent life reserved by Fate
 To follow this? O, never! Fate, I trust
 The same, my soul to; for, as who flings dust,
 Perchance — so facile was the deed, she checked
 The void with these materials to affect

My soul diversely — these consigned anew
 To naught by death, what marvel if she threw
 A second and superber spectacle
 Before it? What may serve for sun — what still
 Wander a moon above me — what else wind
 About me like the pleasures left behind,
 And how shall some new flesh that is not flesh
 Cling to me? what's new laughter — soothes the fresh
 Sleep like sleep? Fate's exhaustless for my sake
 In brave resource, but whether bids she slake
 My thirst at this first rivulet, or count
 No draught worth lip save from the rocky fount
 Above i' the clouds, while here she's provident
 Of pure loquacious pearl, the soft tree-tent
 Guards, with its face of reate and sedge, nor fail
 The silver globules and gold-sparkling grail
 At bottom. O, 't were too absurd to slight
 For the hereafter the to-day's delight!
 Quench thirst at this, then seek next well-spring — wear
 Home-lilies ere strange lotus in my hair!
 Here is the Crowd, whom I with freest heart
 Offer to serve, contented for my part
 To give life up in service, — only grant
 That I do serve; if otherwise, why want
 Aught further of me? If men cannot choose
 But set aside life, why should I refuse
 The gift? I take it — I, for one, engage
 Never to falter through my pilgrimage —
 Nor end it howling that the stock or stone

Were enviable, truly : I, for one,
 Will praise the world, you style mere anteroom
 To the palace — be it so ! shall I assume
 — My foot the courtly gait, my tongue the trope,
 My mouth the smirk, before the doors fly ope
 One moment ? What — with guarders row on row,
 Gay swarms of varletry that come and go,
 Pages to dice with, waiting-girls unlace
 The plackets of, pert claimants help displace,
 Heart-heavy suitors get a rank for, — laugh
 At yon sleek parasite, break his own staff
 'Cross Beetle-brows the Usher's shoulder, — why,
 Admitted to the presence by and by,
 Should thought of having lost these make me grieve
 Among new joys I reach, for joys I leave ?
 — Cool citrine-crystals, fierce pyropus-stone,
 Are floor-work here ! — But did I let alone
 That black-eyed peasant in the vestibule
 Once and forever ? — Floor-work ? No such fool !
 Rather, were heaven to forestall earth, I'd say
 I, is it, must be blessed ? Then, my own way
 Bless me ! give firmer arm and fleeter foot,
 I'll thank you : but to no mad wings transmute
 These limbs of mine — our greensward was so soft !
 Nor camp I on the thunder-cloud aloft :
 We feel the bliss distinctlier, having thus
 Engines subservient, not mixed up with us.
 Better move palpably through heaven — nor, freed
 Of flesh, forsooth, from space to space proceed

200 WHICH, YET, OTHERS HAVE RENOUNCED: HOW?

'Mid flying synods of worlds! No! In heaven's marge
Show Titan still, recumbent o'er his targe
Solid with stars — the Centaur at his game,
Made tremulously out in hoary flame!

Life! Yet the very cup whose extreme dull
Dregs, even, I would quaff, was dashed, at full,
Aside so oft; the death I fly, revealed
So oft a better life this life concealed,
And which sage, champion, martyr, through each path
Have hunted fearlessly — the horrid bath,
The crippling-irons and the fiery chair.

— 'T was well for them; let me become aware
As they, and I relinquish life, too! Let
What masters life disclose itself! Forget
Vain ordinances, I have one appeal —
I feel, am what I feel, know what I feel
— So much is truth to me. What Is, then? Since
One object, viewed diversely, may evince
Beauty and ugliness — this way attract,
That way repel, why gloze upon the fact?
Why must a single of the sides be right?
What bids choose this and leave the opposite?
Where's abstract Right for me? — in youth endued
With Right still present, still to be pursued,
Thro' all the interchange of circles, rife
Each with its proper law and mode of life,
Each to be dwelt at ease in: where, to sway
Absolute with the Kaiser, or obey
Implicit with his serf of fluttering heart,

Or, like a sudden thought of God's, to start
 Up, Brutus in the presence, then go shout
 That some should pick the unstrung jewels out —
 Each, well!"

And, as in moments when the Past
 Gave partially enfranchisement, he cast
 Himself quite through mere secondary states
 Of his soul's essence, little loves and hates,
 Into the mid deep yearnings overlaid
 By these; as who should pierce hill, plain, grove,
 glade,

And on into the very nucleus probe
 That first determined there exist a globe.
 As that were easiest, half the globe dissolved,
 So seemed Sordello's closing-truth evolved
 By his flesh-half's break up — the sudden swell
 Of his expanding soul showed Ill and Well,
 Sorrow and Joy, Beauty and Ugliness,
 Virtue and Vice, the Larger and the Less,
 All qualities, in fine, recorded here,
 Might be but modes of Time and this one sphere,
 Urgent on these, but not of force to bind
 Eternity, as Time — as Matter — Mind,
 If Mind, Eternity, should choose assert
 Their attributes within a Life : thus girt
 With circumstance, next change beholds them cinct
 Quite otherwise — with Good and Ill distinct,
 Joys, sorrows, tending to a like result —
 Contrived to render easy, difficult,

This or the other course of . . . what new bond
 In place of flesh may stop their flight beyond
 Its new sphere, as that course does harm or good
 To its arrangements. Once this understood,
 As suddenly he felt himself alone,
 Quite out of Time and this world : all was known.
 What made the secret of his past despair?
 — Most imminent when he seemed most aware
 Of his own self-sufficiency ; made mad
 By craving to expand the power he had,
 And not new power to be expanded ? — just
 This made it ; Soul on Matter being thrust,
 Joy comes when so much Soul is wrecked in Time
 On Matter, — let the Soul's attempt sublime
 Matter beyond the scheme and so prevent
 By more or less that deed's accomplishment,
 And Sorrow follows : Sorrow how avoid ?
 Let the employer match the thing employed,
 Fit to the finite his infinity,
 And thus proceed forever, in degree
 Changed but in kind the same, still limited
 To the appointed circumstance and dead
 To all beyond. A sphere is but a sphere —
 Small, Great, are merely terms we bandy here —
 Since to the spirit's absoluteness all
 Are like : now, of the present sphere we call
 Life, are conditions — take but this among
 Many ; the body was to be so long
 Youthful, no longer — but, since no control

Tied to that body's purposes his soul,
 She chose to understand the body's trade
 More than the body's self — had fain conveyed
 Her boundless, to the body's bounded lot:
 Hence, the soul permanent, the body not, —
 Scarce the one minute for enjoying here,
 The soul must needs instruct her weak compeer,
 Run o'er its capabilities and wring
 A joy thence, the held worth experiencing —
 Which, far from half discovered even, — lo,
 The minute gone, the body's power let go
 That's portioned to that joy's acquirement! Broke
 Morning o'er earth, he yearned for all it woke —
 From the volcano's vapor-flag, winds hoist
 Black o'er the spread of sea, — down to the moist
 Dale's silken barley-spikes sullied with rain,
 Swayed earthwards, heavily to rise again —
 (The Small, a sphere as perfect as the Great
 To the soul's absoluteness) — meditate
 Too long on such a morning's cluster-chord
 And the whole music it was framed afford, —
 The chord's might half discovered, what should pluck
 One string, his finger, was found palsy-struck.
 And then no marvel if the spirit, shone
 A saddest sight — the body lost alone
 Through her officious proffered help, deprived
 Of this and that enjoyment Fate contrived,
 Virtue, Good, Beauty, each allowed slip hence, —
 Vain-gloriously were fain, for recompense,

204 BUT, EVEN HERE, IS FAILURE INEVITABLE?

To stem the ruin even yet, protract
The body's term, supply the power it lacked
From her infinity, compel it learn
These qualities were only Time's concern,
And body may, with spirit helping, barred —
Advance the same, vanquished — obtain reward,
Reap joy where sorrow was intended grow,
Of Wrong make Right, and turn Ill Good below.
And the result is, the poor body soon
Sinks under what was meant a wondrous boon,
Leaving its bright accomplice all aghast.

So much was plain then, proper in the Past;
To be complete for, satisfy the whole
Series of spheres — Eternity, his soul
Exceeded, so was incomplete for, each
Single sphere — Time. But does our knowledge reach
No farther? Is the cloud of hindrance broke
But by the failing of the fleshly yoke,
Its loves and hates, as now when death lets soar
Sordello, self-sufficient as before,
Though during the mere space that shall elapse
'Twixt his enthrallment in new bonds, perhaps?
Must life be ever just escaped, which should
Have been enjoyed? — nay, might have been and would,
Each purpose ordered right — the soul's no whit
Beyond the body's purpose under it —
Like yonder breadth of watery heaven, a bay,
And that sky-space of water, ray for ray
And star for star, one richness where they mixed

As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,
 Tumultuary splendors folded in
 To die — would soul, proportioned thus, begin
 Exciting discontent, or surelier quell
 The body if, aspiring, it rebel?
 But how so order life? Still brutalize
 The soul, the sad world's way, with muffled eyes
 To all that was before, all that shall be
 After this sphere — and every quality
 Save some sole and immutable Great and Good
 And Beauteous whither fate has loosed its hood
 To follow? Never may some soul see All
 — The Great Before and After, and the Small
 Now, yet be saved by this the simplest lore,
 And take the single course prescribed before,
 As the king-bird with ages on his plumes
 Travels to die in his ancestral glooms?
 But where descry the Love that shall select
 That course? Here is a soul whom, to affect,
 Nature has plied with all her means — from trees
 And flowers — e'en to the Multitude! — and these,
 Decides he save or no? One word to end!"

Ah my Sordello, I this once befriend
 And spêak for you. Of a Power above you still
 Which, utterly incomprehensible,
 Is out of rivalry, which thus you can
 Love, tho' unloving all conceived by man —
 What need! And of — none the minutest duct
 To that out-nature, naught that would instruct

And so let rivalry begin to live —
 But of a Power its representative
 Who, being for authority the same,
 Communication different, should claim
 A course, the first chose and this last revealed —
 This Human clear, as that Divine concealed —
 What utter need !

What has Sordello found ?

Or can his spirit go the mighty round,
 End where poor Eglamor begun ? as says
 Old fable, the two eagles went two ways
 About the world : where, in the midst, they met,
 Though on a shifting waste of sand, men set
 Jove's temple. Quick, what has Sordello found ?
 For they approach — approach — that foot's rebound . .
 Palma ? No, Salinguerra though in mail ;
 They mount, have reached the threshold, dash the veil
 Aside — and you divine who sat there dead,
 Under his foot the badge : still, Palma said,
 A triumph lingering in the wide eyes,
 Wider than some spent swimmer's if he spies
 Help from above in his extreme despair,
 And, head far back on shoulder thrust, turns there
 With short, quick, passionate cry : as Palma prest
 In one great kiss her lips upon his breast
 It beat. By this, the hermit-bee has stopped
 His day's toil at Goito : the new-cropped
 Dead vine-leaf answers, now 't is eve, he bit,
 Twirled so, and filed all day : the mansion's fit,

God counselled for. As easy guess the word
 That passed betwixt them and become the third
 To the soft small unfrighted bee, as tax
 Him with one fault — so, no remembrance racks
 Of the stone maidens and the font of stone
 He, creeping through the crevice, leaves alone.
 Alas, my friend — alas Sordello, whom
 Anon they laid within that old font-tomb —
 And, yet again, alas !

And now is 't worth
 Our while bring back to mind, much less set forth
 How Salinguerra extricates himself
 Without Sordello ? Ghibellin and Guef
 May fight their fiercest out ? If Richard sulked
 In durance or the Marquis paid his mulct,
 Who cares, Sordello gone ? The upshot, sure,
 Was peace ; our chief made some frank overture
 That prospered ; compliment fell thick and fast
 On its disposer, and Taurello passed
 With foe and friend for an outstripping soul,
 Nine days at least. Then, — fairly reached the goal, —
 He, by one effort, blotted the great hope
 Out of his mind, nor further tried to cope
 With Éste, that mad evening's style, but sent
 Away the Legate and the League, content
 No blame at least the brothers had incurred,
 — Despatched a message to the Monk, he heard
 Patiently first to last, scarce shivered at,
 Then curled his limbs up on his wolfskin mat

And ne'er spoke more, — informed the Ferrarese
 He but retained their rule so long as these
 Lingered in pupilage, — and last, no mode
 Apparent else of keeping safe the road
 From Germany direct to Lombardy
 For Friedrich, — none, that is, to guarantee
 The faith and promptitude of who should next
 Obtain Sofia's dowry, — sore perplexed —
 (Sofia being youngest of the tribe
 Of daughters, Ecelin was wont to bribe
 The envious magnates with — nor, since he sent
 Henry of Egna this fair child, had Trent
 Once failed the Kaiser's purposes — “we lost
 Egna last year, and who takes Egna's post —
 Opens the Lombard gate if Friedrich knock?”)
 Himself espoused the Lady of the Rock
 In pure necessity, and so destroyed
 His slender last of chances, quite made void
 Old prophecy, and spite of all the schemes
 Overt and covert, youth's deeds, age's dreams,
 Was sucked into Romano. And so hushed
 He up this evening's work that, when 't was brushed
 Somehow against by a blind chronicle
 Which, chronicling whatever woe befell
 Ferrara, noted this the obscure woe
 Of “Salinguerra's sole son Giacomo
 Deceased, fatuous and doting, ere his sire,”
 The townfolk rubbed their eyes, could but admire
 Which of Sofia's five was meant.

The chaps

Of earth's dead hope were tardy to collapse,
 Obliterated not the beautiful
 Distinctive features at a crash — but dull
 And duller, next year, as Guelf chiefs withdrew
 Each to his stronghold. Then (securely too
 Ecelin at Campese slept — close by,
 Who likes may see him in Solagna lie
 With cushioned head and gloved hand to denote
 The cavalier he was) — then his heart smote
 Young Ecelin at last! — long since adult,
 And, save Vicenza's business, what result
 In blood and blaze? ('t was hard to intercept
 Sordello till his plain withdrawal.) Stept,
 Then, its new lord on Lombardy. I' the nick
 Of time when Ecelin and Alberic
 Closed with Taurello, come precisely news
 That in Verona half the souls refuse
 Allegiance to the Marquis and the Count —
 Have cast them from a throne they bid him mount,
 Their Podestà, thro' his ancestral worth.
 Ecelin flew there, and the town henceforth
 Was wholly his — Taurello sinking back
 From temporary station to a track
 That suited. News received of this acquist,
 Friedrich did come to Lombardy: who missed
 Taurello then? Another year: they took
 Vicenza, left the Marquis scarce a nook
 For refuge, and, when hundreds two or three

N

Of Guelfs conspired to call themselves "the Free,"
 Opposing Alberic, — vile Bassanese, —
 (Without Sordello !) — Ecelin at ease
 Slaughtered them so observably, that oft
 A little Salinguerra looked with soft
 Blue eyes up, asked his sire the proper age
 To get appointed his proud uncle's page.
 More years passed, and that sire had dwindled down
 To a mere showy turbulent soldier, grown
 Better through age, his parts still in repute,
 Subtle — how else ? — but hardly so astute
 As his contemporaneous friends professed ;
 Undoubtedly a brawler : for the rest,
 Known by each neighbor, and allowed for, let
 Keep his incorrigible ways, nor fret
 Men who had missed their boyhood's bugbear — " trap
 The ostrich, suffer our bald osprey flap
 A battered pinion " — was the word. In fine,
 One flap too much and Venice's marine
 Was meddled with ; no overlooking that !
 She captured him in his Ferrara, fat
 And florid at a banquet, more by fraud
 Than force, to speak the truth ; there 's slender laud
 Ascribed you for assisting eighty years
 To pull his death on such a man — fate shears
 The life-cord prompt enough whose last fine threads
 You fritter : so, presiding his board-head,
 The old smile, your assurance all went well
 With Friedrich (as if he were like to tell !)

In rushed (a plan contrived before) our friends,
 Made some pretence at fighting, some amends
 For the shame done his eighty years — (apart
 The principle, none found it in his heart
 To be much angry with Taurello) — gained
 Their galleys with the prize, and what remained
 But carry him to Venice for a show?
 — Set him, as 't were, down gently — free to go
 His gait, inspect our square, pretend observe
 The swallows soaring their eternal curve
 'Twixt Theodore and Mark, if citizens
 Gathered importunately, fives and tens,
 To point their children the Magnifico,
 All but a monarch once in firm-land, go
 His gait among them now — “it took, indeed,
 Fully this Ecelin to supersede
 That man,” remarked the seniors. Singular!
 Sordello's inability to bar
 Rivals the stage, that evening, mainly brought
 About by his strange disbelief that aught
 Was ever to be done, — this thrust the Twain
 Under Taurello's tutelage, — whom, brain
 And heart and hand, he forthwith in one rod
 Indissolubly bound to baffle God
 Who loves the world — and thus allowed the thin
 Gray wizened dwarfish devil Ecelin,
 And massy-muscled big-boned Alberic
 (Mere man, alas!) to put his problem quick
 To demonstration — prove wherever 's will

To do, there's plenty to be done, or ill
 Or good. Anointed, then, to rend and rip —
 Kings of the gag and flesh-hook, screw and whip,
 They plagued the world : a touch of Hildebrand
 (So far from obsolete !) made Lombards band
 Together, cross their coats as for Christ's cause,
 And saving Milan win the world's applause.
 Ecelin perished : and I think grass grew
 Never so pleasant as in Valley Rù
 By San Zenon where Alberic in turn
 Saw his exasperated captors burn
 Seven children and their mother ; then, regaled
 So far, tied on to a wild horse, was traile'd
 To death through raunce and bramble-bush. I take
 God's part and testify that mid the brake
 Wild o'er his castle on the pleasant knoll,
 You hear its one tower left, a belfry, toll —
 The earthquake spared it last year, laying flat
 The modern church beneath, — no harm in that !
 Cherups the contumacious grasshopper,
 Rustles the lizzard and the cushats chirre
 Above the ravage : there, at deep of day
 A week since, heard I the old Canon say
 He saw with his own eyes a barrow burst
 And Alberic's huge skeleton unheard
 Only five years ago. He added, "June's
 The month for carding off our first cocoons
 The silkworms fabricate" — a double news,
 Nor he nor I could tell the worthier. Choose !

And Naddo gone, all's gone ; not Eglamor !
 Believe, I knew the face I waited for,
 A guest my spirit of the golden courts !
 O strange to see how, despite ill-reports,
 Disuse, some wear of years, that face retained
 Its joyous look of love ! Suns waxed and waned,
 And still my spirit held an upward flight,
 Spiral on spiral, gyres of life and light
 More and more gorgeous — ever that face there
 The last admitted ! crossed, too, with some care
 As perfect triumph were not sure for all,
 But, on a few, enduring damp must fall,
 — A transient struggle, haply a painful sense
 Of the inferior nature's clinging — whence
 Slight starting tears easily wiped away,
 Fine jealousies soon stifled in the play
 Of irrepressible admiration — not
 Aspiring, all considered, to their lot
 Who ever, just as they prepare ascend
 Spiral on spiral, wish thee well, impend
 Thy frank delight at their exclusive track,
 That upturned fervid face and hair put back !

Is there no more to say ? He of the rhymes —
 Many a tale, of this retreat betimes,
 Was born : Sordello die at once for men ?
 The Chroniclers of Mantua tired their pen
 Telling how *Sordello Prince Visconti* saved
 Mantua, and elsewhere notably behaved —
 Who thus, by fortune's ordering events,

Passed with posterity, to all intents,
 For just the God he never could become.
 As Knight, Bard, Gallant, men were never dumb
 In praise of him: while what he should have been,
 Could be, and was not — the one step too mean
 For him to take, — we suffer at this day
 Because of: Ecelin had pushed away
 Its chance ere Dante could arrive and take
 That step Sordello spurned, for the world's sake:
 He did much — but Sordello's chance was gone.
 Thus, had Sordello dared that step alone,
 Apollo had been compassed — 't was a fit
 He wished should go to him, not he to it
 — As one content to merely be supposed
 Singing or fighting elsewhere, while he dozed
 Really at home — one who was chiefly glad
 To have achieved the few real deeds he had,
 Because that way assured they were not worth
 Doing, so spared from doing them henceforth —
 A tree that covets fruitage and yet tastes
 Never itself, itself: had he embraced
 Their cause then, men had plucked Hesperian fruit
 And, praising that, just thrown him in to boot
 All he was anxious to appear, but scarce
 Solicitous to be. A sorry farce
 Such life is, after all! cannot I say
 He lived for some one better thing? this way. —
 Lo, on a heathy brown and nameless hill
 By sparkling Asolo, in mist and chill,

Morning just up, higher and higher runs
 A child barefoot and rosy. She! the sun's
 On the square castle's inner-court's low wall
 Like the chine of some extinct animal
 Half turned to earth and flowers; and through the
 haze

(Save where some slender patches of gray maize
 Are to be overleaped) that boy has crost
 The whole hill-side of dew and powder-frost
 Matting the balm and mountain camomile.
 Up and up goes he, singing all the while
 Some unintelligible words to beat
 The lark, God's poet, swooning at his feet,
 So worsted is he at "the few fine locks
 Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
 Sunblanched the livelong summer," — all that's left
 Of the Goito lay! And thus bereft,
 Sleep and forget, Sordello! In effect
 He sleeps, the feverish poet — I suspect
 Not utterly companionless; but, friends,
 Wake up; the ghost's gone, and the story ends
 I'd fain hope, sweetly — seeing, peri or ghoul,
 That spirits are conjectured fair or foul,
 Evil or good, judicious authors think,
 According as they vanish in a stink
 Or in a perfume. Friends, be frank! ye snuff
 Civet, I warrant. Really? Like enough!
 Merely the savour's rareness; any nose
 May ravage with impunity a rose:

216 AS NO PRIZE AT ALL, HAS CONTENTED ME.

Rifle a musk-pod and 't will ache like yours !

I'd tell you that same pungency insures

An after-gust — but that were overbold.

Who would has heard Sordello's story told.

STRAFFORD.

A TRAGEDY.

Dedicated,
IN ALL AFFECTIONATE ADMIRATION,
TO
WILLIAM C. MACREADY.

APRIL 23, 1837.

PERSONS.

CHARLES I.

Earl of HOLLAND.

Lord SAVILE.

Sir HENRY VANE.

WENTWORTH, Viscount WENTWORTH, Earl of STRAFFORD.

JOHN PYM.

JOHN HAMPDEN.

The younger VANE.

DENZIL HOLLIS.

BENJAMIN RUDYARD.

NATHANIEL FIENNES.

Earl of LOUDON.

MAXWELL, Usher of the Black Rod.

BALFOUR, Constable of the Tower.

A Puritan.

Queen HENRIETTA.

LUCY PERCY, Countess of Carlisle.

Presbyterians, Scots Commissioners, Adherents of Strafford,
Secretaries, Officers of the Court, etc. Two of Strafford's
Children.

STRAFFORD.



ACT I.

SCENE I. *A House near Whitehall.* — HAMPDEN, HOLLIS, the younger VANE, RUDYARD, FIENNES, and many of the Presbyterian Party: LOUDON and other Scots Commissioners.

Vane. I say, if he be here —

Rud. (And he is here!) —

Hol. For England's sake let every man be still

Nor speak of him, so much as say his name,

Till Pym rejoin us! Rudyard! Henry Vane!

One rash conclusion may decide our course

And with it England's fate — think — England's fate!

Hampden, for England's sake they should be still!

Vane. You say so, Hollis? Well, I must be still!

It is indeed too bitter that one man,

Any one man's mere presence should suspend

England's combined endeavor: little need

To name him!

Rud. For you are his brother, Hollis!

Hamp. Shame on you, Rudyard! time to tell him that
When he forgets the Mother of us all.

Rud. Do I forget her ?

Hamp. You talk idle hate
Against her foe : is that so strange a thing ?
Is hating Wentworth all the help she needs ?

A Puritan. The Philistine strode, cursing as he
went :

But David — five smooth pebbles from the brook
Within his scrip . . .

Rud. Be you as still as David !

Fien. Here 's Rudyard not ashamed to wag a tongue
Stiff with ten years' disuse of Parliaments ;
Why, when the last sat, Wentworth sat with us !

Rud. Let 's hope for news of them now he returns —
He that was safe in Ireland, as we thought !
— But I 'll abide Pym's coming.

Vane. Now, by Heaven

They may be cool who can, silent who will —
Some have a gift that way ! Wentworth is here,
Here, and the King 's safe closeted with him
Ere this. And when I think on all that 's past
Since that man left us, how his single arm
Rolled the advancing good of England back
And set the woful Past up in its place, —
Exalting Dagon where the Ark should be —
How that man has made firm the fickle King
(Hampton, I will speak out !) — in aught he feared
To venture on before ; taught Tyranny
Her dismal trade, the use of all her tools,
To ply the scourge yet screw the gag so close

That strangled agony bleeds mute to death —
 How he turns Ireland to a private stage
 For training infant villanies, new ways
 Of wringing treasure out of tears and blood,
 Unheard oppressions nourished in the dark
 To try how much man's nature can endure
 — If he dies under it, what harm? if not,
 Why, one more trick is added to the rest
 Worth a king's knowing, and what Ireland bears
 England may learn to bear : how all this while
 That man has set himself to one dear task,
 The bringing Charles to relish more and more
 Power, power without law, power and blood too —
 — Can I be still?

Hamp. For that you should be still.

Vane. O Hampden, then and now! The year he
 left us,

The People in full Parliament could wrest
 The Bill of Rights from the reluctant King ;
 And now, he'll find in an obscure small room
 A stealthy gathering of great-hearted men
 That take up England's cause : England is here !

Hamp. And who despairs of England?

Rud.

That do I,

If Wentworth comes to rule her. I am sick
 To think her wretched masters, Hamilton,
 The muckworm Cottington, the maniac Laud,
 May yet be longed-for back again. I say,
 I do despair.

Vane. And, Rudyard, I'll say this —
 Which all true men say after me, not loud
 But solemnly and as you'd say a prayer!
 This King, who treads our England under foot,
 Has just so much — it may be fear or craft —
 As bids him pause at each fresh outrage; friends,
 He needs some sterner hand to grasp his own,
 Some voice to ask, "Why shrink? — am I not by?"
 Now, one whom England loved for serving her,
 Found in his heart to say, "I know where best
 The iron heel shall bruise her, for she leans
 Upon me when you trample." Witness, you!
 So Wentworth heartened Charles, and England fell.
 But inasmuch as life is hard to take
 From England . . .

Many Voices. Go on, Vane! 'T is well said, Vane!

Vane. — Who has not so forgotten Runnymede! —

Voices. 'T is well and bravely spoken, Vane! Go on!

Vane. There are some little signs of late she knows
 The ground no place for her! She glances round,
 Wentworth has dropped the hand, is gone his way
 On other service: what if she arise?
 No! the King beckons, and beside him stands
 The same bad man once more, with the same smile
 And the same gesture. Now shall England crouch,
 Or catch at us and rise?

Voices.

The Renegade!

Haman! Ahithophel!

Hamp.

Gentlemen of the North,

It was not thus, the night your claims were urged,
 And we pronounced the League and Covenant
 The cause of Scotland, England's cause as well !
 Vane there, sat motionless the whole night through.

Vane. Hampden.

Fien. Stay, Vane !

Lou. Be just and patient, Vane !

Vane. Mind how you counsel patience, Loudon ! you
 Have still a Parliament, and this your League
 To back it ; you are free in Scotland still :
 While we are brothers, hope 's for England yet.
 But know you wherefore Wentworth comes ? to quench
 This last of hopes ? that he brings war with him ?
 Know you the man's self ? what he dares ?

Lou. We know,
 All know — 't is nothing new.

Vane. And what 's new, then,
 In calling for his life ? Why, Pym himself —
 You must have heard — ere Wentworth dropped our
 cause

He would see Pym first ; there were many more
 Strong on the people's side and friends of his,
 Eliot that's dead, Rudyard and Hampden here,
 But for these Wentworth cared not ; only, Pym
 He would see — Pym and he were sworn, 't is said,
 To live and die together ; so, they met
 At Greenwich. Wentworth, you are sure, was long,
 Specious enough, the Devil's argument
 Lost nothing on his lips ; he 'd have Pym own

A patriot could not play a purer part
 Than follow in his track ; they two combined
 Might put down England. Well, Pym heard him out ;
 One glance — you know Pym's eye — one word was all :
 “ You leave us, Wentworth ! while your head is on,
 I'll not leave you.”

Hamp. Has he left Wentworth, then ?
 Has England lost him ? Will you let him speak,
 Or put your crude surmises in his mouth ?
 Away with this ! Will you have Pym or Vane ?

Voices. Wait Pym's arrival ! Pym shall speak.

Hamp. Meanwhile
 Let Loudon read the Parliament's report
 From Edinburgh : our last hope, as Vane says,
 Is in the stand it makes. Loudon !

Vane. No, no !
 Silent I can be : not indifferent !

Hamp. Then each keep silence, praying God to spare
 His anger, cast not England quite away
 In this her visitation !

A Puritan. Seven years long
 The Midianite drove Israel into dens
 And caves. Till God sent forth a mighty man,

Pym enters.

Even Gideon !

Pym. Wentworth's come : nor sickness, care,
 The ravaged body nor the ruined soul,
 More than the winds and waves that beat his ship,
 Could keep him from the King. He has not reached

Whitehall : they 've hurried up a Council there
 To lose no time and find him work enough.
 Where 's Loudon ? your Scots' Parliament . . .

Lou.

Holds firm :

We were about to read reports.

Pym.

The King

Has just dissolved your Parliament.

Lou. and other Scots.

Great God !

An oath-breaker ! Stand by us, England, then !

Pym. The King 's too sanguine ; doubtless Went-
 worth 's here ;

But still some little form might be kept up.

Hamp. Now speak, Vane ! Rudyard, you had much
 to say !

Hol. The rumor 's false, then . . .

Pym.

Ay, the Court gives out

His own concerns have brought him back : I know

'T is the King calls him : Wentworth supersedes

The tribe of Cottingtons and Hamiltons

Whose part is played ; there 's talk enough, by this, —

Merciful talk, the King thinks : time is now

To turn the record's last and bloody leaf

That, chronicling a nation's great despair,

Tells they were long rebellious, and their lord

Indulgent, till, all kind expedients tried,

He drew the sword on them and reigned in peace.

Laud's laying his religion on the Scots

Was the last gentle entry : the new page

Shall run, the King thinks, "Wentworth thrust it
 down

At the sword's point."

A Puritan. I'll do your bidding, Pym,
England's and God's — one blow!

Pym. A goodly thing —
We all say, friends, it is a goodly thing
To right that England! Heaven grows dark above :
Let's snatch one moment ere the thunder fall,
To say how well the English spirit comes out
Beneath it! All have done their best, indeed,
From lion Eliot, that grand Englishman,
To the least here : and who, the least one here,
When she is saved (for her redemption dawns,
Dimly, most dimly, but it dawns — it dawns)
Who'd give at any price his hope away
Of being named along with the Great Men?
We would not — no, we would not give that up!

Hamp. And one name shall be dearer than all names.
When children, yet unborn, are taught that name
After their fathers', — taught what matchless man . . .

Pym. . . . Saved England! What if Wentworths
should be still

That name?

Rud. and others. We have just said it, Pym! His
death

Saves her! We said it — there's no way beside!
I'll do God's bidding, Pym! They struck down Joab
And purged the land.

Vane. No villanous striking-down!

Rud. No, a calm vengeance : let the whole land rise

And shout for it. No Feltons !

Pym.

Rudyard, no !

England rejects all Feltons ; most of all
Since Wentworth . . . Hampden, say the trust again
Of England in her servants — but I 'll think
You know me, all of you. Then, I believe,
Spite of the Past, Wentworth rejoins you, friends !

Vane and others. Wentworth ? apostate ! Judas !
double-dyed

A traitor ! Is it Pym, indeed . . .

Pym.

. . . Who says

Vane never knew that Wentworth, loved that man,
Was used to stroll with him, arm locked in arm,
Along the streets to see the people pass
And read in every island-countenance
Fresh argument for God against the King, —
Never sat down, say, in the very house
Where Eliot's brow grew broad with noble thoughts,
(You 've joined us, Hampden — Hollis, you as well,)
And then left talking over Gracchus' death . . .

Vane. To frame, we know it well, the choicest clause
In the Petition of Rights : he framed such clause
One month before he took at the King's hand
His Northern Presidency, which that Bill
Denounced.

Pym.

Too true ! Never more, never more
Walked we together ! Most alone I went.
I have had friends — all here are fast my friends —
But I shall never quite forget that friend.

And yet it could not but be real in him !
You, Vane, — you Rudyard, have no right to trust
To Wentworth : but can no one hope with me ?
Hampden, will Wentworth dare shed English blood
Like water ?

Hamp. Ireland is Aceldama.

Pym. Will he turn Scotland to a hunting-ground
To please the King, now that he knows the King ?
The People or the King ? and that King, Charles !

Hamp. Pym, all here know you : you 'll not set
your heart
On any baseless dream. But say one deed
Of Wentworth's, since he left us . . . [*Shouting without.*

Vane. There ! he comes,
And they shout for him ! Wentworth 's at Whitehall,
The King embracing him, now, as we speak,
And he, to be his match in courtesies,
Taking the whole war's risk upon himself,
Now, while you tell us here how changed he is !
Hear you ?

Pym. And yet if 't is a dream, no more,
That Wentworth chose their side, and brought the
King

To love it as though Laud had loved it first,
And the Queen after ; — that he led their cause
Calm to success, and kept it spotless through,
So that our very eyes could look upon
The travail of our souls and close content
That violence, which something mars even right

Which sanctions it, had taken off no grace
From its serene regard. Only a dream !

Hamp. We meet here to accomplish certain good
By obvious means, and keep tradition up
Of free assemblages, else obsolete,
In this poor chamber : nor without effect
Has friend met friend to counsel and confirm,
As, listening to the beats of England's heart,
We spoke its wants to Scotland's prompt reply
By these her delegates. Remains alone
That word grow deed, as with God's help it shall —
But with the Devil's hindrance, who doubts too ?
Looked we or no that tyranny should turn
Her engines of oppression to their use ?
Whereof, suppose the worst be Wentworth here —
Shall we break off the tactics which succeed
In drawing out our formidablest foe,
Let bickering and disunion take their place ?
Or count his presence as our conquest's proof,
And keep the old arms at their steady play ?
Proceed to England's work ! Fiennes, read the list !

Fiennes. Ship-money is refused or fiercely paid
In every county, save the northern parts
Where Wentworth's influence . . . (*shouting.*)

Vane. I, in England's name,
Declare her work, this way, at end ! Till now,
Up to this moment, peaceful strife was best.
We English had free leave to think ; till now,
We had a shadow of a Parliament

In Scotland. But all 's changed : they change the first,
They try brute-force for law, they first of all . . .

Voices. Good ! . Talk enough ! The old true hearts
with Vane !

Vane. Till we crush Wentworth for her, there 's no
act

Serves England !

Voices. Vane for England !

Pym. Pym should be
Something to England. I seek Wentworth, friends.

SCENE II. — *Whitehall.*

Lady CARLISLE and WENTWORTH.

Went. And the King ?

Lady Car. Wentworth, lean on me ! sit then, —
I 'll tell you all ; this horrible fatigue
Will kill you.

Went. No ; or — Lucy, just your arm ;
I 'll not sit till I 've cleared this up with him :
After that, rest. The King ?

Lady Car. Confides in you.

Went. Why ? or, why now ? — They have kind
throats, the knaves !
Shout for me — they !

Lady Car. You come so strangely soon :
Yet we took measures to keep off the crowd —
Did they shout for you ?

Went. Wherefore should they not?
Does the King take such measures for himself?
Beside, there's such a dearth of malecontents,
You say!

Lady Car. I said but few dared carp at you.

Went. At me? at us, I hope! The King and I!
He's surely not disposed to let me bear
The fame away from him of these late deeds
In Ireland? I am yet his instrument
Be it for well or ill? He trusts me, too!

Lady Car. The King, dear Wentworth, purposes, I
said,

To grant you, in the face of all the Court . . .

Went. All the Court! Evermore the Court about us!
Savile and Holland, Hamilton and Vane
About us, — then the King will grant me — what?
That he for once put these aside and say —
“Tell me your whole mind, Wentworth!”

Lady Car. You professed
You would be calm.

Went. Lucy, and I am calm!
How else shall I do all I come to do,
Broken, as you may see, body and mind,
How shall I serve the King? time wastes meanwhile,
You have not told me half. His footstep! No.
Quick, then, before I meet him, — I am calm —
Why does the King distrust me?

Lady Car. He does not
Distrust you.

Went. Lucy, you can help me; you
Have even seemed to care for me: one word!
Is it the Queen?

Lady Car. No, not the Queen: the party
That poisons the Queen's ear, Savile and Holland.

Went. I know, I know: and Vane, too, he's one too?
Go on — and he's made Secretary. Well?
Or leave them out and go straight to the charge;
The charge!

Lady Car. O, there's no charge, no precise charge;
Only they sneer, make light of — one may say,
Nibble at what you do.

Went. I know! but Lucy,
I reckoned on you from the first! — Go on!
— Was sure could I once see this gentle friend
When I arrived, she'd throw an hour away
To help her . . . what am I?

Lady Car. You thought of me,
Dear Wentworth?

Went. But go on! The party here!

Lady Car. They do not think your Irish Government
Of that surpassing value . . .

Went. The one thing
Of value! The one service that the crown
May count on! All that keeps these very Vanes
In power, to vex me — not that they do vex,
Only it might vex some to hear that service
Decried, the sole support that's left the King!

Lady Car. So the Archbishop says.

Went.

Ah? well, perhaps

The only hand held up in my defence

May be old Laud's! These Hollands, then, these
Saviles

Nibble? They nibble? — that's the very word!

Lady Car. Your profit in the Customs, Bristol says,
Exceeds the due proportion: while the tax . . .

Went. Enough! 't is too unworthy, — I am not
So patient as I thought! What's Pym about?

Lady Car. Pym?

Went. Pym and the People.

Lady Car. O, the Faction!

Extinct — of no account: there'll never be
Another Parliament.

Went. Tell Savile that!

You may know — (ay, you do — the creatures here
Never forget!) that in my earliest life

I was not . . . much that I am now! The King

May take my word on points concerning Pym

Before Lord Savile's, Lucy, or if not,

I bid them ruin their wise selves, not me,

These Vanes and Hollands! I'll not be their tool

Who might be Pym's friend yet.

But there's the King

Where is he?

Lady Car. Just apprised that you arrive.

Went. And why not here to meet me? I was told
He sent for me, nay, longed for me!

Lady Car.

Because, —

He is now . . . I think a Council's sitting now
About this Scots affair.

Went. A Council sits?

They have not taken a decided course
Without me in the matter?

Lady Car. I should say . . .

Went. The war? They cannot have agreed to that?
Not the Scots' war? — without consulting me —
Me, that am here to show how rash it is,
How easy to dispense with? — Ah, you too
Against me! well, — the King may take his time.
— Forget it, Lucy! cares make peevish: mine
Weigh me (but 't is a secret) to my grave.

Lady Car. For life or death I am your own, dear
friend! [*Goes out.*

Went. Heartless! but all are heartless here. Go
now,

Forsake the People! — I did not forsake
The People: they shall know it — when the King
Will trust me! — who trusts all beside at once,
While I have not spoke Vane and Savile fair,
And am not trusted: have but saved the Throne:
Have not picked up the Queen's glove prettily,
And am not trusted. But he'll see me now.
Weston is dead: the Queen's half English now —
More English: one decisive word will brush
These insects from . . . the step I know so well!
The King! But now, to tell him . . . no — to ask
What's in me he distrusts: — or, best begin

By proving that this frightful Scots affair
Is just what I foretold. So much to say,
And the flesh fails, now ! and the time is come,
And one false step no way to be repaired !
You were avenged, Pym, could you look on me !

Pym enters.

Went. I little thought of you just then.

Pym. No ? I

Think always of you, Wentworth.

Went. The old voice !

I wait the King, sir.

Pym. True — you look so pale !

A Council sits within ; when that breaks up

He 'll see you.

Went. Sir, I thank you.

Pym. O, thank Laud !

You know when Laud once gets on Church affairs

The case is desperate : he 'll not be long

To-day : he only means to prove, to-day,

We English all are mad to have a hand

In butchering the Scots for serving God

After their fathers' fashion : only that !

Went. Sir, keep your jests for those who relish them

(Does *he* enjoy their confidence ?) 'T is kind

To tell me what the Council does.

Pym. You grudge

That I should know it had resolved on war

Before you came ? no need : you shall have all

The credit, trust me.

Went. Have the Council dared —
They have not dared . . . that is — I know you not.
Farewell, sir: times are changed.

Pym. — Since we two met
At Greenwich? Yes: poor patriots though we be,
You cut a figure, makes some slight return
For your exploits in Ireland! Changed indeed,
Could our friend Eliot look from out his grave!
Ah, Wentworth, one thing for acquaintance' sake,
Just to decide a question; have you, now,
Felt your old self since you fors'ok us?

Went. Sir!

Pym. Spare me the gesture! you misapprehend!
Think not I mean the advantage is with me.
I was about to say that, for my part,
I never quite held up my head since then, —
Was quite myself since then: for first, you see,
I lost all credit after that event
With those who recollect how sure I was
Wentworth would outdo Eliot on our side.
Forgive me: Savile, old Vane, Holland here,
Eschew plain-speaking: 't is a trick I keep.

Went. How, when, where, Savile, Vane and Holland
speak,
Plainly or otherwise, would have my scorn,
All of my scorn, sir . . .

Pym. . . Did not my poor thoughts
Claim somewhat?

Went. Keep your thoughts! believe the King

Mistrusts me for their prattle, all these Vanes
And Saviles ! make your mind up, o' God's love,
That I am discontented with the King !

Pym. Why, you may be : I should be, that I know,
Were I like you.

Went. Like me ?

Pym. I care not much
For titles : our friend Eliot died no Lord,
Hampden 's no Lord, and Savile is a Lord :
But you care, since you sold your soul for one.
I can't think, therefore, your soul's purchaser
Did well to laugh you to such utter scorn
When you twice prayed so humbly for its price,
The thirty silver pieces . . I should say,
The Earldom you expected, still expect,
And may. Your letters were the movingest !
Console yourself : I 've borne him prayers just now
From Scotland not to be oppressed by Laud,
Words moving in their way : he 'll pay, be sure,
As much attention as to those you sent.

Went. False, sir ! — Who showed them you ? suppose it so,
The King did very well . . nay, I was glad
When it was shown me : I refused, the first !
John Pym, you were my friend — forbear me once !

Pym. O Wentworth, ancient brother of my soul,
That all should come to this !

Went. Leave me !

Pym. My friend,

Why should I leave you?

Went. To tell Rudyard this,
And Hampden this!

Pym. Whose faces once were bright
At my approach — now sad with doubt and fear,
Because I hope in you — yes, Wentworth, you
Who never mean to ruin England — you
Who shake off, with God's help, an obscene dream
In this Ezekiel chamber, where it crept
Upon you first, and wake, yourself — your true
And proper self, our Leader, England's Chief,
And Hampden's friend!

This is the proudest day!
Come Wentworth! Do not even see the King!
The rough old room will seem itself again!
We'll both go in together: you've not seen
Hampden so long: come: and there's Fiennes: you'll
have

To know young Vane. This is the proudest day!
[*The KING enters. WENTWORTH lets fall PYM's hand.*

Cha. Arrived, my Lord? — This gentleman, we know,
Was your old friend.

The Scots shall be informed
What we determine for their happiness.

[*PYM goes out.*

You have made haste, my Lord.

Went. Sir, I am come . . .

Cha. To see an old familiar — nay, 't is well;
Aid us with his experience: this Scots' League

And Covenant spreads too far, and we have proofs
That they intrigue with France : the Faction, too,
Whereof your friend there is the head and front,
Abets them, — as he boasted, very like.

Went. Sir, trust me ! but for this once, trust me,
sir !

Cha. What can you mean ?

Went. That you should trust me, sir !
O — not for my sake ! but 't is sad, so sad
That for distrusting me, you suffer — you
Whom I would die to serve : sir, do you think
That I would die to serve you ?

Cha. But rise, Wentworth !

Went. What shall convince you ? What does
Savile do

To prove him . . . Ah, one can't tear out one's heart
And show it, how sincere a thing it is !

Cha. Have I not trusted you ?

Went. Say aught but that !
There is my comfort, mark you : all will be
So different when you trust me — as you shall !
It has not been your fault, — I was away,
Mistook, maligned, how was the King to know ?
I am here, now — he means to trust me, now —
All will go on so well !

Cha. Be sure I do —

I've heard that I should trust you : as you came,
Your friend, the Countess, told me . . .

Went. No, — hear nothing —

Be told nothing about me! you're not told
Your right-hand serves you, or your children love you!

Cha. You love me, Wentworth: rise!

Went. I can speak now.

I have no right to hide the truth. 'T is I
Can save you; only I. Sir, what must be?

Cha. Since Laud's assured (the minutes are within)
— Loath as I am to spill my subjects' blood . . .

Went. That is, he'll have a war: what's done is done!

Cha. They have intrigued with France; that's clear
to Laud.

Went. Has Laud suggested any way to meet
The war's expense?

Cha. He'd not decide so far
Until you joined us.

Went. Most considerate!
He's certain they intrigue with France, these Scots?
The People would be with us.

Cha. Pym should know.

Went. The People for us — were the People for us!
Sir, a great thought comes to reward your trust:
Summon a Parliament! in Ireland first,
Then, here.

Cha. In truth?

Went. That saves us! that puts off
The war, gives time to right their grievances —
To talk with Pym. I know the Faction, as
Laud styles it, tutors Scotland: all their plans
Suppose no Parliament: in calling one

You take them by surprise. Produce the proofs
Of Scotland's treason; then bid England help:
Even Pym will not refuse.

Cha. You would begin
With Ireland?

Went. Take no care for that: that's sure
To prosper.

Cha. You shall rule me. You were best
Return at once: but take this ere you go!
Now, do I trust you? You're an Earl: my Friend
Of Friends: yes, while . . . You hear me not!

Went. Say it all o'er again — but once again:
The first was for the music — once again!

Cha. Strafford, my friend, there may have been re-
ports,
Vain rumors. Henceforth touching Strafford is
To touch the apple of my sight: why gaze
So earnestly?

Went. I am grown young again,
And foolish. What was it we spoke of?

Cha. Ireland,
The Parliament, —

Went. I may go when I will?
— Now?

Cha. Are you tired so soon of us?

Went. My King!
But you will not so utterly abhor
A Parliament? I'd serve you any way.

Cha. You said just now this was the only way.

Went. Sir, I will serve you!

Cha. Strafford, spare yourself —
You are so sick, they tell me.

Went. 'T is my soul
That 's well and prospers, now!

 This Parliament —
We 'll summon it, the English one — I 'll care
For everything. You shall not need them much.

Cha. If they prove restive . . .

Went. I shall be with you.

Cha. Ere they assemble?

Went. I will come, or else
Deposit this infirm humanity
I' the dust. My whole heart stays with you, my King!

[*As WENTWORTH goes out, the QUEEN enters.*]

Cha. That man must love me!

Queen. Is it over then?

Why, he looks yellower than ever! well,
At least we shall not hear eternally
Of service — services: he 's paid at least.

Cha. Not done with: he engages to surpass
All yet performed in Ireland.

Queen. I had thought
Nothing beyond was ever to be done.
The war, Charles — will he raise supplies enough?

Cha. We 've hit on an expedient; he . . . that is,
I have advised . . . we have decided on
The calling — in Ireland — of a Parliament.

Queen. O truly! You agree to that? Is that

The first fruit of his counsel ? But I guessed
As much.

Cha. This is too idle, Henriette !
I should know best. He will strain every nerve,
And once a precedent established . . .

Queen. Notice
How sure he is of a long term of favors !
He 'll see the next, and the next after that ;
No end to Parliaments !

Cha. Well, it is done.
He talks it smoothly, doubtless. If, indeed,
The Commons here . . .

Queen. Here ! you will summon them
Here ? Would I were in France again to see
A King !

Cha. But Henriette . . .

Queen. O, the Scots see clear ?
Why should they bear your rule ?

Cha. But listen, Sweet !

Queen. Let Wentworth listen — you confide in him !

Cha. I do not, Love — I do not so confide ?
The Parliament shall never trouble us
. . Nay, hear me ! I have schemes, such schemes : we 'll
buy

The leaders off : without that, Wentworth's counsel
Had ne'er prevailed on me. Perhaps I call it
To have excuse for breaking it forever,
And whose will then the blame be ? See you not ?
Come, Dearest ! — look ! the little fairy, now,
That cannot reach my shoulder ! Dearest, come !

A C T II.

SCENE I. — (As in Act I. Scene I.)

*The same Party enters.**Rud.* Twelve subsidies!*Vane.* O Rudyard, do not laugh
At least!*Rud.* True : Strafford called the Parliament —
'Tis he should laugh!*A Puritan.* Out of the serpent's root
Comes forth a cockatrice.*Fien.* — A stinging one,
If that's the Parliament : twelve subsidies!
A stinging one! but, brother, where's your word
For Strafford's other nest-egg, the Scots' war?*The Puritan.* His fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.*Fien.* Shall be? It chips the shell, man; peeps
abroad.

Twelve subsidies! — Why, how now, Vane?

Rud. Peace, Fiennes!*Fien.* Ah? — But he was not more a dupe than I,
Or you, or any here, the day that Pym
Returned with the good news. Look up, friend Vane!
We all believed that Strafford meant us well
In summoning the Parliament.HAMPDEN *enters.**Vane.* Now, Hampden,

Clear me ! I would have leave to sleep again ;
 I'd look the People in the face again :
 Clear me from having, from the first, hoped, dreamed
 Better of Strafford !

Hamp. You may grow one day
 A steadfast light to England, Henry Vane !

Rud. Meantime, by flashes I make shift to see
 Strafford revived our Parliaments ; before,
 War was but talked of ; there 's an army, now :
 Still, we 've a Parliament ! Poor Ireland bears
 Another wrench (she dies the hardest death !)
 Why, speak of it in Parliament ! and, lo,
 'Tis spoken ! so console yourselves.

Fien. The jest !
 We clamored, I suppose, thus long, to win
 The privilege of laying on our backs
 A sorer burden than the King dares lay !

Rud. Mark now : we meet at length, complaints pour
 in
 From every county, all the land cries out
 On loans and levies, curses ship-money,
 Calls vengeance on the Star-chamber ; we lend
 An ear. " Ay, lend them all the ears you have !"
 Puts in the King ; " my subjects, as you find,
 Are fretful, and conceive great things of you.
 Just listen to them, friends ; you 'll sanction me
 The measures they most wince at, make them yours,
 Instead of mine, I know : and, 'to begin,
 They say my levies pinch them, — raise me straight

Twelve subsidies!"

Fien. All England cannot furnish
Twelve subsidies!

Hol. But Strafford, just returned
From Ireland — what has he to do with that?
How could he speak his mind? He left before
The Parliament assembled. Pym, who knows
Strafford . . .

Rud. Would I were sure we know ourselves!
What is for good, what, bad — who friend, who foe!

Hol. Do you count Parliaments no gain?

Rud. A gain?
While the King's creatures overbalance us?
— There's going on, beside, among ourselves
A quiet, slow, but most effectual course
Of buying over, sapping, leavening
The lump till all is leaven. Glanville's gone.
I'll put a case; had not the Court declared
That no sum short of just twelve subsidies
Will be accepted by the King — our House,
I say, would have consented to that offer
To let us buy off ship-money!

Hol. Most like,
If, say, six subsidies will buy it off,
The House . . .

Rud. Will grant them! Hampden, do you hear?
Congratulate with me! the King's the king,
And gains his point at last — our own assent
To that detested tax! all's over, then!

There's no more taking refuge in this room,
 Protesting, "Let the King do what he will,
 We, England, are no party to our shame :
 Our day will come !" Congratulate with me !

Pym enters.

Vane. Pym, Strafford called this Parliament, you say,
 But we'll not have our Parliaments like those
 In Ireland, Pym !

Rud. Let him stand forth, your friend !
 One doubtful act hides far too many sins ;
 It can be stretched no more, and, to my mind,
 Begins to drop from those it covered.

Other Voices. Good !
 Let him avow himself ! No fitter time !
 We wait thus long for you.

Rud. Perhaps, too long !
 Since nothing but the madness of the Court,
 In thus unmasking its designs at once,
 Has saved us from betraying England. Stay —
 This Parliament is Strafford's : let us vote
 Our list of grievances too black by far
 To suffer talk of subsidies : or best,
 That ship-money's disposed of long ago
 By England : any vote that's broad enough :
 And then let Strafford, for the love of it,
 Support his Parliament !

Vane. And vote as well
 No war's to be with Scotland ! Hear you, Pym ?
 We'll vote, no war ! No part nor lot in it

For England!

Many Voices. Vote, no war! Stop the new levies!
No Bishop's war! At once! When next we meet!

Pym. Much more when next we meet! Friends,
which of you

Since first the course of Strafford was in doubt,
Has fallen the most away in soul from me?

Vane. I sat apart, even now, under God's eye,
Pondering the words that should denounce you, Pym,
In presence of us all, as one at league
With England's enemy.

Pym. You are a good
And gallant spirit, Henry. Take my hand
And say you pardon me for all the pain
Till now! Strafford is wholly ours.

Many Voices. Sure? sure?

Pym. Most sure: for Charles dissolves the Par-
liament
While I speak here.

— And I must speak, friends, now!
Strafford is ours. The King detects the change,
Casts Strafford off forever, and resumes
His ancient path: no Parliament for us,
No Strafford for the King!

Come, all of you,
To bid the King farewell, predict success
To his Scots' expedition, and receive
Strafford, our comrade now. The next will be
Indeed a Parliament!

Vane. Forgive me, Pym !

Voices. This looks like truth : Strafford can have,
indeed,

No choice.

Pym. Friends, follow me ! He 's with the King.
Come, Hampden, and come, Rudyard, and come, Vane !
This is no sullen day for England, sirs !
Strafford shall tell you !

Voices. To Whitehall then ! Come !

SCENE II. — *Whitehall.*

CHARLES and STRAFFORD.

Cha. Strafford !

Straf. Is it a dream ? my papers, here —
Thus, as I left them, all the plans you found
So happy — (look ! the track you pressed my hand
For pointing out) — and in this very room,
Over these very plans, you tell me, sir,
With the same face, too, — tell me just one thing
That ruins them ! How 's this ? What may this mean ?
Sir, who has done this ?

Cha. Strafford, who but I ?
You bade me put the rest away : indeed
You are alone.

Straf. Alone, and like to be !
No fear, when some unworthy scheme 's grown ripe,

Of those, who hatched it, leaving me to loose
The mischief on the world! Laud hatches war,
Falls to his prayers, and leaves the rest to me,
And I'm alone.

Cha. At least, you knew as much
When first you undertook the war.

Straf. My liege,
Was this the way? I said, since Laud would lap
A little blood, 't were best to hurry over
The loathsome business, not to be whole months
At slaughter — one blow, only one, then, peace,
Save for the dreams. I said, to please you both
I'd lead an Irish army to the West,
While in the South an English . . . but you look
As though you had not told me fifty times
'T was a brave plan! My army is all raised,
I am prepared to join it . . .

Cha. Hear me, Strafford!

Straf. . . . When, for some little thing, my whole
design

Is set aside — (where is the wretched paper?)
I am to lead — (ay, here it is) — to lead
The English army: why? Northumberland
That I appointed, chooses to be sick —
Is frightened: and, meanwhile, who answers for
The Irish Parliament? or army, either?
Is this my plan?

Cha. So disrespectful, sir?

Straf. My liege, do not believe it! I am yours,

Yours ever: 't is too late to think about :
 To the death, yours. Elsewhere; this untoward step
 Shall pass for mine ; the world shall think it mine.
 But, here ! But, here ! I am so seldom here,
 Seldom with you, my King ! I, soon to rush
 Alone upon a giant in the dark !

Cha. My Strafford !

Straf. [*examines papers awhile.*] "Seize the passes
 of the Tyne" !

But, sir, you see — see all I say is true?
 My plan was sure to prosper, so, no cause
 To ask the Parliament for help ; whereas
 We need them frightfully.

Cha. Need the Parliament?

Straf. Now, for God's sake, sir, not one error more !
 We can afford no error ; we draw, now,
 Upon our last resource : the Parliament
 Must help us !

Cha. I've undone you, Strafford !

Straf. Nay —

Nay — why despond, sir ? 't is not come to that !
 I have not hurt you ? Sir, what have I said
 To hurt you ? I unsay it ! Don't despond !
 Sir, do you turn from me ?

Cha. My friend of friends !

Straf. We'll make a shift ! Leave me the Parliament !
 Help they us ne'er so little and I'll make
 Sufficient out of it. We'll speak them fair.
 They're sitting, that's one great thing ; that half gives

Their sanction to us ; that 's much : don't despond !
Why, let them keep their money, at the worst !
The reputation of the People's help
Is all we want : we 'll make shift yet !

Cha.

Good Strafford !

Straf. But meantime, let the sum be ne'er so small
They offer, we 'll accept it : any sum —
For the look of it : the least grant tells the Scots
The Parliament is ours — their stanch ally
Turned ours : that told, there 's half the blow to strike !
What will the grant be ? What does Glanville think ?

Cha. Alas !

Straf. My liege ?

Cha.

Strafford !

Straf.

But answer me !

Have they . . . O surely not refused us half ?
Half the twelve subsidies ? We never looked
For all of them ! How many do they give

Cha. You have not heard . . .

Straf. (What has he done ?) — Heard what ?

But speak at once, sir, this grows terrible !

[*The King continuing silent.*]

You have dissolved them ! — I 'll not leave this man.

Cha. 'T was old Vane's ill-judged vehemence.

Straf.

Old Vane ?

Cha. He told them, just about to vote the half,
That nothing short of all twelve subsidies
Would serve our turn, or be accepted.

Straf.

Vane !

Vane ! Who, sir, promised me that very Vane . . .
 O God, to have it gone, quite gone from me,
 The one last hope — I that despair, *my* hope —
 That I should reach his heart, one day, and cure
 All bitterness one day, be proud again
 And young again, care for the sunshine too,
 And never think of Eliot any more, —
 God, and to toil for this, go far for this,
 Get nearer, and still nearer, reach this heart
 And find Vane there !

*[Suddenly taking up a paper, and continuing with
 a forced calmness.]*

Northumberland is sick :

Well then, I take the army : Wilmot leads
 The Horse, and he with Conway must secure
 The passes of the Tyne : Ormond supplies
 My place in Ireland. Here, we'll try the City :
 If they refuse a loan — debase the coin
 And seize the bullion ! we've no other choice.
 Herbert . . .

And this while I am here ! with you !
 And there are hosts such, hosts like Vane ! I go,
 And, I once gone, they'll close around you, sir,
 When the least pique, pettiest mistrust, is sure
 To ruin me — and you along with me !
 Do you see that ? And you along with me !
 — Sir, you'll not ever listen to these men,
 And I away, fighting your battle ? Sir,
 If they — if She — charge me, no matter how —

Say you, "At any time when he returns
His head is mine!" Don't stop me there! You know
My head is yours, but never stop me there!

Cha. Too shameful, Strafford! You advised the
war,

And . . .

Straf. I! I! that was never spoken with
Till it was entered on! That loathe the war!
That say it is the maddest, wickedest . . .
Do you know, sir, I think, within my heart,
That you would say I did advise the war;
And if, through your own weakness, or what's worse,
These Scots, with God to help them, drive me back,
You will not step between the raging People
And me, to say . . .

I knew it! from the first
I knew it! Never was so cold a heart!
Remember that I said it — that I never
Believed you for a moment!

— And, you loved me?

You thought your perfidy profoundly hid
Because I could not share the whisperings
With Vane? With Savile? What, the face was
masked?

I had the heart to see, sir! Face of flesh,
But heart of stone — of smooth, cold, frightful stone!
Ay, call them! Shall I call for you? The Scots
Goaded to madness? Or the English — Pym —
Shall I call Pym, your subject? Oh, you think

I'll leave them in the dark about it all?
 They shall not know you? Hampden, Pym shall not?

PYM, HAMPDEN, VANE, *etc. enter.*

[*Dropping on his knee.*] Thus favored with your gracious countenance

What shall a rebel League avail against
 Your servant, utterly and ever yours?
 So, gentlemen, the King's not even left
 The privilege of bidding me farewell
 Who haste to save the People — that you style
 Your People — from the mercies of the Scots
 And France their friend?
 [*To CHARLES.*] Pym's grave gray eyes are fixed
 Upon you, sir!

Your pleasure, gentlemen?

Hamp. The King dissolved us — 't is the King we seek

And not Lord Strafford.

Straf. — Strafford, guilty too
 Of counselling the measure. [*To CHARLES.*] (Hush . . .
 you know —

You have forgotten — sir, I counselled it)
 A heinous matter, truly! But the King
 Will yet see cause to thank me for a course
 Which now, perchance . . . (Sir, tell them so!) — he
 blames.

Well, choose some fitter time to make your charge:
 I shall be with the Scots, you understand?
 Then yelp at me!

Q

Meanwhile, your Majesty
 Binds me, by this fresh token of your trust . . .

[Under the pretence of an earnest farewell, STRAFFORD conducts CHARLES to the door, in such a manner as to hide his agitation from the rest : as the King disappears, they turn as by one impulse to PYM, who has not changed his original posture of surprise.]

Hamp. Leave we this arrogant strong wicked man !
Vane and others. Hence, Pym ! Come out of this
 unworthy place
 To our old room again ! He's gone.

[STRAFFORD, just about to follow the King, looks back.]

Pym. Not gone !
[To STRAFFORD.] Keep tryst ! the old appointment's
 made anew :

Forget not we shall meet again !

Straf. So be it !
 And if an army follows me ?

Vane. His friends
 Will entertain your army !

Pym. I'll not say
 You have misreckoned, Strafford : time shows. Perish,
 Body and spirit ! Fool to feign a doubt,
 Pretend the scrupulous and nice reserve
 Of one whose prowess should achieve the feat !
 What share have I in it ? Shall I affect
 To see no dismal sign above your head
 When God suspends his ruinous thunder there ?
 Strafford is doomed. Touch him no one of you !

[PYM, HAMPDEN, etc. go out.]

Straf. Pym, we shall meet again !

Lady CARLISLE enters.

You here, child ?

Lady Car.

Hush —

I know it all : hush, Strafford !

Straf.

Ah ? you know ?

Well. I shall make a sorry soldier, Lucy !

All knights begin their enterprise, we read,

Under the best of auspices ; 't is morn,

The Lady girds his sword upon the Youth

(He 's always very young) — the trumpets sound,

Cups pledge him, and, why, the King blesses him —

You need not turn a page of the Romance

To learn the Dreadful Giant's fate. Indeed.

We 've the fair Lady here ; but she apart, —

A poor man, rarely having handled lance,

And rather old, weary, and far from sure

His Squires are not the Giant's friends. All 's one :

Let us go forth !

Lady Car. Go forth ?

Straf.

What matters it ?

We shall die gloriously — as the book says.

Lady Car. To Scotland ? not to Scotland ?

Straf.

Am I sick

Like your good brother, brave Northumberland ?

Beside, these walls seem falling on me.

Lady Car.

Strafford,

The wind that saps these walls can undermine

Your camp in Scotland, too. Whence creeps the wind ?

Have you no eyes except for Pym? Look here!
 A breed of silken creatures lurk and thrive
 In your contempt. You'll vanquish Pym? Old Vane
 Can vanquish you! And Vane you think to fly?
 Rush on the Scots! Do nobly! Vane's slight sneer
 Shall test success, adjust the praise, suggest
 The faint result: Vane's sneer shall reach you there.
 — You do not listen!

Straf. Oh, — I give that up;
 There's fate in it: I give all here quite up.
 Care not what old Vane does or Holland does
 Against me! 'T is so idle to withstand —
 In no case tell me what they do!

Lady Car. But Strafford . . .

Straf. I want a little strife, beside; real strife;
 This petty, palace-warfare does me harm:
 I shall feel better, fairly out of it.

Lady Car. Why do you smile?

Straf. I got to fear them, child!
 I could have torn his throat at first, old Vane's,
 As he leered at me on his stealthy way
 To the Queen's closet. Lord, one loses heart!
 I often found it in my heart to say
 "Do not traduce me to her!"

Lady Car. But the King . . .

Straf. The King stood there, 't is not so long ago,
 — There; and the whisper, Lucy, "Be my friend
 Of friends!" — My King! I would have . . .

Lady Car. . . . Died for him?

Straf. Sworn him true, Lucy: I can die for him.

Lady Car. But go not, Strafford! But you must renounce

This project on the Scots! Die! wherefore die?

Charles never loved you.

Straf. And he never will.

He's not of those who care the more for men

That they're unfortunate.

Lady Car. Then wherefore die

For such a master?

Straf. You that told me first

How good he was — when I must leave true friends

To find a truer friend! — that drew me here

From Ireland, — “I had but to show myself

And Charles would spurn Vane, Savile, and the rest” —

You, child, to ask me this?

Lady Car. (If he have set

His heart abidingly on Charles!)

Then, friend,

I shall not see you any more!

Straf. Yes, Lucy.

There's one man here I have to meet.

Lady Car. (The King!

What way to save him from the King?

My soul —

That lent from its own store the charmed disguise

That clothes the King — he shall behold my soul!)

Strafford, — I shall speak best if you'll not gaze

Upon me: I had never thought, indeed,

To speak, but you would perish, too! So sure!
 Could you but know what 't is to bear, my friend,
 One image stamped within you, turning blank
 The else imperial brilliance of your mind, —
 A weakness, but most precious, — like a flaw
 I' the diamond, which should shape forth some sweet
 face

Yet to create, and meanwhile treasured there
 Lest Nature lose her gracious thought forever!

Straf. When could it be? no! Yet . . . was it the day
 We waited in the anteroom, till Holland
 Should leave the presence-chamber?

Lady Car.

What?

Straf.

— That I

Described to you my love for Charles?

Lady Car.

(Ah, no —

One must not lure him from a love like that!
 O, let him love the King and die! 'T is past.
 I shall not serve him worse for that one brief
 And passionate hope, silent forever now!)
 And you are really bound for Scotland, then?
 I wish you well: you must be very sure
 Of the King's faith, for Pym and all his crew
 Will not be idle — setting Vane aside!

Straf. If Pym is busy, — you may write of Pym.

Lady Car. What need, since there's your King to
 take your part?

He may endure Vane's counsel; but for Pym —
 Think you he'll suffer Pym to . . .

Straf. Child, your hair
Is glossier than the Queen's !

Lady Car. Is that to ask
A curl of me ?

Straf. Scotland —— the weary way !

Lady Car. Stay, let me fasten it.

— A rival's, Strafford ?

Straf. [*showing the George.*] He hung it there :
twine yours around it, child !

Car. No — no — another time — I trifle so !
And there's a masque on foot. Farewell. The Court
Is dull ; do something to enliven us
In Scotland : we expect it at your hands.

Straf. I shall not fall in Scotland.

Lady Car. Prosper — if
You'll think of me sometimes !

Straf. How think of him
And not of you ? of you, the lingering streak
(A golden one) in my good fortune's eve.

Lady Car. Strafford . . . Well, when the eve has its
last streak

The night has its first star. [*She goes out.*]

Straf. That voice of hers —
You'd think she had a heart sometimes ! His voice
Is soft too.

Only God can save him now.
Be Thou about his bed, about his path !
His path ! Where's England's path ? Diverging wide
And not to join again the track my foot

Must follow — whither? All that forlorn way
Among the tombs! Far — far — till . . . What, they do
Then join again, these paths? For, huge in the dusk,
There's — Pym to face!

Why then, I have a foe
To close with, and a fight to fight at last
Worthy my soul! What, do they beard the King,
And shall the King want Strafford at his need?
Am I not here? Not in the market-place,
Pressed on by the rough artisans, so proud
To catch a glance from Wentworth! They'll lie down
Hungry and smile "Why, it must end some day —
Is he not watching for our sake?"

— Not there!

But in Whitehall, the whited sepulchre,
The . . .

Curse nothing to-night! Only one name
They'll curse in all those streets to-night. Whose
fault?

Did I make kings? set up, the first, a man
To represent the multitude, receive
All love in right of them — supplant them so,
Until you love the man and not the king —
The man with the mild voice and mournful eyes
Which send me forth.

— To breast the bloody sea
That sweeps before me: with one star for guide.
Night has its first, supreme, forsaken star.

ACT III.

SCENE I. *Opposite Westminster Hall.*

Sir HENRY VANE, LORD SAVILE, LORD HOLLAND, and others of
the Court.

Sir H. Vane. The Commons thrust you out?

Savile. And what kept you

From sharing their civility?

Sir H. Vane. Kept me?

Fresh news from Scotland, sir! worse than the last,

If that may be! All's up with Strafford there:

Nothing to bar the mad Scots marching hither

Next Lord's-day morning. That detained me, sir!

Well now, before they thrust you out, — go on, —

Their Speaker — did the fellow Lenthall say

All we set down for him?

Hol. Not a word missed.

Ere he began, we entered, Savile, I

And Bristol and some more, with hope to breed

A wholesome awe in the new Parliament.

But such a gang of graceless ruffians, Vane,

As glared at us!

Vane. So many?

Savile. Not a bench

Without its complement of burly knaves;

Your hopeful son among them: Hampden leant

Upon his shoulder — think of that!

Vane. I'd think

On Lenthall's speech, if I could get at it.
 Urged he, I ask, how grateful they should prove
 For this unlooked-for summons from the King?

Hol. Just as we drilled him.

Vane. That the Scots will march
 On London?

Hol. All, and made so much of it,
 A dozen subsidies at least seemed sure
 To follow, when . . .

Vane. Well?

Hol. 'T is a strange thing now!
 I've a vague memory of a sort of sound,
 A voice, a kind of vast, unnatural voice —
 Pym, sir, was speaking! Savile, help me out:
 What was it all?

Sav. Something about "a matter" —
 No, — "a work for England."

Hol. "England's great revenge"
 He talked of.

Sav. How should I get used to Pym
 More than yourselves?

Hol. However that may be,
 'T was something with which we had naught to do,
 For we were "strangers" and 't was "England's
 work" —

(All this while looking us straight in the face)
 In other words, our presence might be spared.
 So, in the twinkling of an eye, before
 I settled to my mind what ugly brute

Was likest Pym just then, they yelled us out,
Locked the doors after us, and here are we.

Vane. Eliot's old method . . .

Sav. Prithee, Vane, a truce
To Eliot and his times, and the great Duke,
And how to manage Parliaments! 'T was you
Advised the Queen to summon this : why, Strafford
(To do him justice) would not hear of it.

Vane. Say, rather, you have done the best of turns
To Strafford : he's at York, we all know why.
I would you had not set the Scots on Strafford
Till Strafford put down Pym for us, my lord !

Sav. Was it I altered Strafford's plans ? did I . . .

A Messenger enters.

Mes. The Queen, my lords — she sends me : follow me
At once ; 't is very urgent ! she requires
Your counsel : something perilous and strange
Occasions her command.

Sav. We follow, friend !
Now, Vane ; — your Parliament will plague us all !

Vane. No Strafford here beside !

Sav. If you dare hint
I had a hand in his betrayal, sir . . .

Hol. Nay, find a fitter time for quarrels — Pym
Will overmatch the best of you ; and, think,
The Queen !

Vane. Come on, then : understand, I loathe
Strafford as much as any — but his use !
To keep off Pym — to screen a friend or two !
I would we had reserved him yet awhile.

SCENE II. — *Whitehall.**The QUEEN and Lady CARLISLE.**Queen.* It cannot be.*Lady Car.* It is so.*Queen.* Why, the House

Have hardly met.

Lady Car. They met for that.*Queen.* No, no!

Meet to impeach Lord Strafford? 'T is a jest.

Lady Car. A bitter one.*Queen.* Consider! 'T is the House

We summoned so reluctantly, which nothing

But the disastrous issue of the war

Persuaded us to summon. They'll wreak all

Their spite on us, no doubt; but the old way

Is to begin by talk of grievances:

They have their grievances to busy them.

Lady Car. Pym has begun his speech.*Queen.* Where's Vane? — That is,

Pym will impeach Lord Strafford if he leaves

His Presidency; he's at York, we know,

Since the Scots beat him: why should he leave York?

Lady Car. Because the King sent for him.*Queen.* Ah — but if

The King did send for him, he let him know

We had been forced to call a Parliament —

A step which Strafford, now I come to think,
Was vehement against.

Lady Car. The policy
Escaped him, of first striking Parliaments
To earth, then setting them upon their feet
And giving them a sword : but this is idle.
Did the King send for Strafford ? He will come.

Queen. And what am I to do ?

Lady Car. What do ? Fail, madam !
Be ruined for his sake ! what matters how,
So it but stand on record that you made
An effort, only one ?

Queen. The King 's away
At Theobalds.

Lady Car. Send for him at once : he must
Dissolve the House.

Queen. Wait till Vane finds the truth
Of the report : then . .

Lady Car. — It will matter little
What the King does. Strafford that lends his arm,
And breaks his heart for you !

Sir H. VANE *enters.*

Vane. The Commons, madam,
Are sitting with closed doors. A huge debate,
No lack of noise ; but nothing, I should guess,
Concerning Strafford : Pym has certainly
Not spoken yet.

Queen. [*To Lady CARLISLE.*] You hear ?

Lady Car. I do not hear
That the King's sent for!
Sir H. Vane. Savile will be able
To tell you more.

HOLLAND enters.

Queen. The last news, Holland?
Hol. Pym
Is raging like a fire. The whole House means
To follow him together to Whitehall
And force the King to give up Strafford.

Queen. Strafford?

Hol. If they content themselves with Strafford! Laud
Is talked of, Cottington and Windebank too,
Pym has not left out one of them — I would
You heard Pym raging!

Queen. Vane, go find the King!
Tell the King, Vane, the People follow Pym
To brave us at Whitehall!

SAVILE enters.

Savile. Not to Whitehall —
'T is to the Lords they go : they'll seek redress
On Strafford from his peers — the legal way,
They call it.

Queen. (Wait, Vane!)

Sav. But the adage gives
Long life to threatened men. Strafford can save
Himself so readily : at York, remember,
In his own county, what has he to fear?

The Commons only mean to frighten him
From leaving York. Surely, he will not come.

Queen. Lucy, he will not come !

Lady Car. Once more, the King
Has sent for Strafford. He will come.

Vane. Oh, doubtless !
And bring destruction with him ; that 's his way.
What but his coming spoilt all Conway's plan ?
The King must take his counsel, choose his friends,
Be wholly ruled by him ! What's the result ?
The North that was to rise, Ireland to help, —
What came of it ? In my poor mind, a fright
Is no prodigious punishment.

Lady Car. A fright ?
Pym will fail worse than Strafford if he thinks
To frighten him. [*To the QUEEN.*] You will not save
him, then ?

Sav. When something like a charge is made, the
King
Will best know how to save him : and 't is clear,
While Strafford suffers nothing by the matter,
The King may reap advantage : this in question,
No dinning you with ship-money complaints !

Queen. [*To Lady CARLISLE.*] If we dissolve them,
who will pay the army ?
Protect us from the insolent Scots ?

Lady Car. In truth
I know not, madam. Strafford's fate concerns
Me little : you desired to learn what course

Would save him: I obey you.

Vane. Notice, too,
There can't be fairer ground for taking full
Revenge — (Strafford's revengeful) — than he'll have
Against his old friend Pym.

Queen. Why, he shall claim
Vengeance on Pym!

Vane. And Strafford, who is he
To 'scape unscathed amid the accidents
That harass all beside? I, for my part,
Should look for something like discomfiture
Had the King trusted me so thoroughly
And been so paid for it.

Hol. He'll keep at York:
All will blow over: he'll return no worse,
Humbled a little, thankful for a place
Under as good a man. Oh, we'll dispense
With seeing Strafford for a month or two!

STRAFFORD enters.

Queen. You here!

Straf. The King sends for me, madam.

Queen. Sir,
The King...

Straf. An urgent matter that imports the King.
[To Lady CARLISLE.] Why, Lucy, what's in agitation
now

That all this muttering and shrugging, see,
Begins at me? They do not speak!

Car. 'T is welcome!

For we are proud of you — happy and proud
 To have you with us, Strafford! you were stanch
 At Durham: you did well there! Had you not
 Been stayed, you might have we said, even now,
 Our hope's in you!

Sir H. Vane. [*To Lady CARLISLE.*] The Queen would
 speak with you.

Straf. Will one of you, his servants here, vouchsafe
 To signify my presence to the King?

Sav. An urgent matter?

Straf. None that touches you,
 Lord Savile! Say, it were some treacherous,
 Sly, pitiful intriguing with the Scots —
 You would go free, at least! (They half divine
 My purpose!) Madam, shall I see the King?
 The service I would render, much concerns
 His welfare.

Queen. But his Majesty, my lord,
 May not be here, may . . .

Straf. Its importance, then,
 Must plead excuse for this withdrawal, madam,
 And for the grief it gives Lord Savile here.

Queen. [*who has been conversing with VANE and HOL-*
LAND.] The King will see you, sir.

[*To Lady CARLISLE.*] Mark me: Pym's worst
 Is done by now: he has impeached the Earl,
 Or found the Earl too strong for him, by now.
 Let us not seem instructed! We should work
 No good to Strafford, but deform ourselves

With shame in the world's eye. [*To STRAFFORD.*] His Majesty

Has much to say with you.

Straf.

Time fleeting, too!

[*To Lady CARLISLE.*] No means of getting them away? And She —

What does she whisper? Does she know my purpose?

What does she think of it? Get them away!

Queen. [*To Lady CARLISLE.*] He comes to baffle Pym — he thinks the danger

Far off: tell him no word of it! a time

For help will come; we'll not be wanting then.

Keep him in play, Lucy — you, self-possessed

And calm! [*To STRAFFORD.*] To spare your Lordship some delay

I will myself acquaint the King. [*To Lady CARLISLE.*] Beware!

[*The QUEEN, VANE, HOLLAND, and SAVILE go out.*]

Straf. She knows it?

Lady Car.

Tell me, Strafford!

Straf.

Afterward!

This moment's the great moment of all time.

She knows my purpose?

Lady Car.

Thoroughly: just now

She bade me hide it from you.

Straf.

Quick, dear child,

The whole o' the scheme?

Lady Car.

(Ah, he would learn if they

Connive at Pym's procedure ! Could they but
Have once apprised the King ! But there 's no time
For falsehood, now.) Strafford, the whole is known.

Straf. Known and approved ?

Lady Car. Hardly discountenanced.

Straf. And the King — say, the King consents as
well ?

Lady Car. The King 's not yet informed, but will
not dare

To interpose.

Straf. What need to wait him, then ?

He 'll sanction it ! I stayed, child, tell him, long !

It vexed me to the soul — this waiting here.

You know him, there 's no counting on the King.

Tell him I waited long !

Lady Car. (What can he mean ?

Rejoice at the King's hollowness ?)

Straf. I knew

They would be glad of it, — all over once,

I knew they would be glad : but he 'd contrive,

The Queen and he, to mar, by helping it,

An angel's making.

Lady Car. (Is he mad ?) Dear Strafford,

You were not wont to look so happy.

Straf. Sweet,

I tried obedience thoroughly. I took

The King's wild plan : of course, ere I could reach

My army, Conway ruined it. I drew

The wrecks together, raised all heaven and earth,

And would have fought the Scots : the King at once
 Made truce with them. Then, Lucy, then, dear child,
 God put it in my mind to love, serve, die
 For Charles, but never to obey him more !
 While he endured their insolence at Ripon
 I fell on them at Durham. But you 'll tell
 The King I waited ? All the anteroom
 Is filled with my adherents.

Lady Car.

Strafford — Strafford,

What daring act is this you hint ?

Straf.

No, no !

'T is here, not daring if you knew ! all here !

[Drawing papers from his breast.]

Full proof, see, ample proof — does the Queen know
 I have such damning proof ? Bedford and Essex,
 Broke, Warwick, Savile (did you notice Savile ?
 The simper that I spoilt ?) Saye, Mandeville —
 Sold to the Scots, body and soul, by Pym ?

Lady Car. Great heaven !

Straf.

From Savile and his lords, to Pym

And his losels, crushed ! — Pym shall not ward the blow
 Nor Savile creep aside from it ! The Crew
 And the Cabal — I crush them !

Lady Car.

And you go —

Strafford, — and now you go ? —

Straf.

— About no work

In the background, I promise you ! I go
 Straight to the House of Lords to claim these knaves.
 Mainwaring !

Lady Car. Stay — stay, Strafford !

Straf. She 'll return,

The Queen — some little project of her own !

No time to lose : the King takes fright perhaps.

Lady Car. Pym 's strong, remember !

Straf. Very strong, as fits

The Faction's head — with no offence to Hampden,

Vane, Rudyard, and my loving Hollis — one

And all they lodge within the Tower to-night

In just equality. Bryan ! Mainwaring !

[*Many of his Adherents enter.*]

The Peers debate just now (a lucky chance)

On the Scots' war ; my visit 's opportune.

When all is over, Bryan, you 'll proceed

To Ireland : these despatches, mark me, Bryan,

Are for the Deputy, and these for Ormond :

We want the army here — my army, raised

At such a cost, that should have done such good,

And was inactive all the time ! no matter,

We 'll find a use for it. Willis . . . or, no — You !

You, friend, make haste to York : bear this, at once . . .

Or, — better stay for form's sake — see yourself

The news you carry. You remain with me

To execute the Parliament's command,

Mainwaring ! help to seize the lesser knaves ;

Take care there 's no escaping at backdoors :

I 'll not have one escape, mind me — not one !

I seem revengeful, Lucy ? Did you know

What these men dare !

Lady Car. It is so much they dare !

Straf. I proved that long ago ; my turn is now !
 Keep sharp watch, Goring, on the citizens ;
 Observe who harbors any of the brood
 That scramble off : be sure they smart for it !
 Our coffers are but lean.

And you, child, too,
 Shall have your task ; deliver this to Laud.
 Laud will not be the slowest in my praise :
 "Thorough" he'll say ! — Foolish, to be so glad !
 This life is gay and glowing, after all :
 'Tis worth while, Lucy, having foes like mine
 Just for the bliss of crushing them. To-day
 Is worth the living for.

Lady Car. That reddening brow !
 You seem . . .

Straf. Well — do I not ? I would be well —
 I could not but be well on such a day !
 And, this day ended, 't is of slight import
 How long the ravaged frame subjects the soul
 In Strafford.

Lady Car. Noble Strafford !

Straf. No farewell !
 I'll see you anon, to-morrow — the first thing.
 — If She should come to stay me !

Lady Car. Go — 't is nothing —
 Only my heart that swells : it has been thus
 Ere now : go, Strafford !

Straf. To-night, then, let it be.

4.

No doubt.

I would Pym had made haste : that's Bryan, hush —
The gallant pointing.

Strafford's Followers. — 1. Mark these worthies, now !

2. A goodly gathering ! “ Where the carcass is
There shall the eagles ” — what's the rest ?

3.

For eagles

Say crows.

A Presbyterian. Stand back, sirs !

One of Strafford's Followers. Are we in Geneva ?

A Presbyterian. No — nor in Ireland ; we have leave
to breathe.

One of Strafford's Followers. Truly ? Behold how
privileged we be

To serve “ King Pym ” ! There's Some-one at White-
hall

Who skulks obscure ; but Pym struts . . .

The Presbyterian.

Nearer.

A Follower of Strafford.

Higher,

We look to see him. [*To his Companions.*] I'm to have
St. John

In charge ; was he among the knaves just now
That followed Pym within there ?

Another.

The gaunt man

Talking with Rudyard. Did the Earl expect
Pym at his heels so fast ? I like it not.

MAXWELL *enters.*

Another. Why, man, they rush into the net ! Here's
Maxwell —

Ha, Maxwell? How the brethren flock around
The fellow! Do you feel the Earl's hand yet
Upon your shoulder, Maxwell?

Max.

Gentlemen,

Stand back! A great thing passes here.

A Follower of Strafford. [*To another.*] The Earl
Is at his work! [*To M.*] Say, Maxwell, what great
thing!

Speak out! [*To a Presbyterian.*] Friend, I've a kind-
ness for you! Friend,

I've seen you with St. John: O stockishness!

Wear such a ruff, and never call to mind

St. John's head in a charger? How, the plague,

Not laugh?

Another. Say, Maxwell, what great thing!

Another.

Nay, wait:

The jest will be to wait.

First.

And who's to bear

These demure hypocrites? You'd swear they came . . .

Came . . . just as we come!

[*A Puritan enters hastily and without observing STRAFFORD'S
Followers.*

The Puritan.

How goes on the work?

Has Pym . . .

A Follower of Strafford. The secret's out at last,

Aha,

The carrion's scented! Welcome, crow the first!

Gorge merrily, you with the blinking eye!

"King Pym has fallen!"

The Puritan. Pym?

A Strafford. Pym!

A Presbyterian. Only Pym?

Many of Strafford's Followers. No, brother, not Pym
only; Vane as well,

Rudyard as well, Hampden, St. John as well!

A Presbyterian. My mind misgives: can it be true?

Another. Lost! Lost!

A Strafford. Say we true, Maxwell?

The Puritan. Pride before destruction,

A haughty spirit goeth before a fall.

Many of Strafford's Followers. Ah now! The very
thing! A word in season!

A golden apple in a silver picture,

To greet Pym as he passes!

[*The doors at the back begin to open, noise and light issuing.*]

Max. Stand back, all!

Many of the Presbyterians. I hold with Pym! And I!

Strafford's Followers. Now for the text!

He comes! Quick!

The Puritan. How hath the oppressor ceased!

The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked!

The sceptre of the rulers, he who smote

The people in wrath with a continual stroke,

That ruled the nations in his anger — he

Is persecuted and none hindereth!

[*The doors open, and STRAFFORD issues in the greatest disorder,
and amid cries from within of "Void the House."*]

Straff. Impeach me! Pym! I never struck, I think,

The felon on that calm insulting mouth
When it proclaimed — Pym's mouth proclaimed me . .
God !

Was it a word, only a word that held
The outrageous blood back on my heart — which beats !
Which beats ! Some one word — “Traitor,” did he say,
Bending that eye, brimful of bitter fire,
Upon me ?

Max. In the Commons' name, their servant
Demands Lord Strafford's sword.

Straf. What did you say ?

Max. The Commons bid me ask your Lordship's
sword.

Straf. Let us go forth : follow me, gentlemen !
Draw your swords too : cut any down that bar us.
On the King's service ! Maxwell, clear the way !

[*The Presbyterians prepare to dispute his passage.*]

Straf. I stay : the King himself shall see me here.
Your tablets, fellow !

[*To MAINWARING.*] Give that to the King !

Yes, Maxwell, for the next half-hour, let be !

Nay, you shall take my sword !

[*MAXWELL advances to take it.*]

Or, no — not that !

Their blood, perhaps, may wipe out all thus far,
All up to that — not that ! Why, friend, you see,
When the King lays your head beneath my foot
It will not pay for that. Go, all of you !

Max. I dare, my lord, to disobey : none stir !

Straf. This gentle Maxwell!—Do not touch him,
Bryan!

[*To the Presbyterians.*] Whichever cur of you will
carry this

Escapes his fellows' fate. None saves his life?

None?

[*Cries from within of "STRAFFORD."*

Slingsby, I've loved you at least: make haste!

Stab me! I have not time to tell you why.

You then, my Bryan! Mainwaring, you, then!

Is it because I spoke so hastily

At Allerton? The King had vexed me.

[*To the Presbyterians.*] You!

—Not even you? If I live over this,

The King is sure to have your heads, you know!

But what if I can't live this minute through?

Pym, who is there with his pursuing smile!

[*Louder cries of "STRAFFORD."*

The King! I troubled him, stood in the way

Of his negotiations, was the one

Great obstacle to peace, the Enemy

Of Scotland: and he sent for me, from York,

My safety guaranteed—having prepared

A Parliament—I see! And at Whitehall

The Queen was whispering with Vane—I see

The trap! [*Tearing off the George.*

I tread a gewgaw underfoot,

And cast a memory from me. One stroke, now!

[*His own adherents disarm him. Renewed cries of "STRAFFORD."*

England! I see thy arm in this and yield.

Pray you now — Pym awaits me — pray you now!

[STRAFFORD reaches the doors: they open wide. HAMPDEN,
and a crowd discovered, and, at the bar, PYM standing apart.
As STRAFFORD kneels, the scene shuts.

ACT IV.

SCENE I. — Whitehall.

The KING, the QUEEN, HOLLIS, Lady CARLISLE. (VANE, HOLLAND, SAVILE, in the background.)

Lady Car. Answer them, Hollis, for his sake! One word!

Cha. [To HOLLIS.] You stand, silent and cold, as though I were

Deceiving you — my friend, my playfellow

Of other times. What wonder after all?

Just so, I dreamed my People loved me.

Hol.

Sir,

It is yourself that you deceive, not me.

You'll quit me comforted, your mind made up

That, since you've talked thus much and grieved thus much,

All you can do for Strafford has been done.

Queen. If you kill Strafford — (come, we grant you leave,

Suppose) —

Hol. I may withdraw, sir ?

Lady Car. Hear them out !

'T is the last chance for Strafford ! Hear them out !

Hol. " If we kill Strafford " — on the eighteenth day
Of Strafford's trial — " *We !* "

Cha. Pym, my good Hollis —
Pym, I should say !

Hol. Ah, true — sir, pardon me !
You witness our proceedings every day ;
But the screened gallery, I might have guessed,
Admits of such a partial glimpse at us,
Pym takes up all the room, shuts out the view.
Still, on my honor, sir, the rest of the place
Is not unoccupied. The Commons sit
— That 's England ; Ireland sends, and Scotland too,
Their representatives ; the Peers that judge
Are easily distinguished ; one remarks
The People here and there : but the close curtain
Must hide so much !

Queen. Acquaint your insolent crew,
This day the curtain shall be dashed aside !
It served a purpose.

Hol. Think ! This very day ?
Ere Strafford rises to defend himself ?

Cha. I will defend him, sir ! — sanction the Past
This day : it ever was my purpose. Rage
At me, not Strafford !

Lady Car. Nobly ! — will he not
Do nobly ?

Hol. Sir, you will do honestly ;
And, for that deed, I too would be a king.

Cha. Only, to do this now ! — “ deaf ” (in your style)
“ To subjects’ prayers,” — I must oppose them now.
It seems their will the Trial should proceed, —
So palpably their will !

Hol. You peril much,
But it were no bright moment save for that.
Strafford, your prime support, the sole roof-tree
That props this quaking House of Privilege,
(Floods come, winds beat, and see — the treacherous
sand !)

Doubtless, if the mere putting forth an arm
Could save him, you ’d save Strafford.

Cha. And they mean
Calmly to consummate this wrong ! No hope ?
This ineffaceable wrong ! No pity then ?

Hol. No plague in store for perfidy ? — Farewell !
You called me, sir — [*To Lady CARLISLE*] you, lady,
bade me come

To save the Earl : I came, thank God for it,
To learn how far such perfidy can go !
You, sir, concert with me on saving him
Who have just ruined Strafford !

Cha. I ? — and how ?

Hol. Eighteen days long he throws, one after one,
Pym’s charges back : a blind moth-eaten law !
— He ’ll break from it at last : and whom to thank ?
The mouse that gnawed the lion’s net for him

Got a good friend, — but he, the other mouse,
That looked on while the lion freed himself —
Fared he so well, does any fable say ?

Cha. What can you mean ?

Hol. Pym never could have proved
Strafford's design of bringing up the troops
To force this kingdom to obedience : Vane —
Your servant, not our friend, has proved it.

Cha. Vane ?

Hol. This day. Did Vane deliver up or no
Those notes which, furnished by his son to Pym,
Seal Strafford's fate ?

Cha. Sir, as I live, I know
Nothing that Vane has done ! What treason next ?
I wash my hands of it. Vane, speak the truth !
Ask Vane himself !

Hol. I will not speak to Vane
Who speak to Pym and Hampden every day.

Queen. Speak to Vane's master then ! What gain
to him

Were Strafford's death ?

Hol. Ha ? Strafford cannot turn
As you, sir, sit there — bid you forth, demand
If every hateful act were not set down
In his commission ? — Whether you contrived
Or no, that all the violence should seem
His work, the gentle ways — your own, his part
To counteract the King's kind impulses —
While . . . but you know what he could say ! And then

He might produce, — mark, sir, — a certain charge
To set the King's express command aside,
If need were, and be blameless ! He might add . .

Cha. Enough !

Hol. — Who bade him break the Parliament,
Find some pretext for setting up sword-law !

Queen. Retire !

Cha. Once more, whatever Vane dared do,
I know not : he is rash, a fool — I know
Nothing of Vane !

Hol. Well — I believe you. Sir,
Believe me, in return, that . . .
[*Turning to Lady CARLISLE.*] Gentle lady,
The few words I would say, the stones might hear
Sooner than these, — I rather speak to you,
You, with the heart ! The question, trust me, takes
Another shape, to-day : not, if the King
Or England shall succumb, — but, who shall pay
The forfeit, Strafford or his master. Sir,
You loved me once : think on my warning now !

[*Goes out.*]

Cha. On you and on your warning both ! — Carlisle !
That paper !

Queen. But consider !

Cha. Give it me !
There, signed — will that content you ? Do not speak !
You have betrayed me, Vane. See ! any day,
According to the tenor of that paper,
He bids your brother bring the army up,

Strafford shall head it and take full revenge.
Seek Strafford ! Let him have the same, before
He rises to defend himself !

Queen.

In truth ?

That your shrewd Hollis should have worked a change
Like this ! You, late reluctant . . .

Cha.

Say, Carlisle

Your brother Percy brings the army up,
Falls on the Parliament — (I'll think of you,
My Hollis !) say, we plotted long — 't is mine,
The scheme is mine, remember ! Say, I cursed
Vane's folly in your hearing ! If the Earl
Does rise to do us shame, the fault shall lie
With you, Carlisle !

Lady Car.

Nay, fear not me ! but still

That 's a bright moment, sir, you throw away.
Tear down the veil and save him !

Queen.

Go, Carlisle !

Lady Car. (I shall see Strafford — speak to him : my
heart

Must never beat so, then ! And if I tell
The truth ? What 's gained by falsehood ? There they
stand

Whose trade it is, whose life it is ! How vain
To gild such rottenness ! Strafford shall know,
Thoroughly know them !)

Queen.

Trust to me ! [*To CARLISLE.*] Carlisle,
You seem inclined, alone of all the Court,
To serve poor Strafford : this bold plan of yours

Merits much praise, and yet . . .

Lady Car. Time presses, madam.

Queen. Yet — may it not be something premature ?

Strafford defends himself to-day — reserves

Some wondrous effort, one may well suppose !

Lady Car. Ay, Hollis hints as much.

Cha. Why linger then ?

Haste with the scheme — my scheme : I shall be there

To watch his look. Tell him I watch his look !

Queen. Stay, we'll precede you !

Lady Car. At your pleasure.

Cha. Say —

Say, Vane is hardly ever at Whitehall !

I shall be there, remember !

Lady Car. Doubt me not.

Cha. On our return, Carlisle, we wait you here !

Lady Car. I'll bring his answer. Sir, I follow you.

(Prove the King faithless, and I take away

All Strafford cares to live for : let it be —

'T is the King's scheme !

My Strafford, I can save,

Nay, I *have* saved you, yet am scarce content,

Because my poor name will not cross your mind.

Strafford, how much I am unworthy you !)

SCENE II. — *A passage adjoining Westminster Hall.*

Many groups of Spectators of the Trial. Officers of the Court, etc

1st Spec. More crowd than ever! Not know Hampden, man?

That's he, by Pym, Pym that is speaking now.

No, truly, if you look so high you'll see

Little enough of either!

2d Spec. Stay: Pym's arm

Points like a prophet's rod.

3d Spec. Ay, ay, we've heard

Some pretty speaking: yet the Earl escapes.

4th Spec. I fear it: just a foolish word or two

About his children — and we see, forsooth,

Not England's foe in Strafford, but the man

Who, sick, half-blind . . .

2d Spec. What's that Pym's saying now

Which makes the curtains flutter? look! A hand

Clutches them. Ah! The King's hand!

5th Spec. I had thought

Pym was not near so tall. What said he, friend?

2d Spec. "Nor is this way a novel way of blood,"

And the Earl turns as if to . . . look! look!

Many Spectators. There!

What ails him? no — he rallies, see — goes on

And Strafford smiles. Strange!

An Officer. Haselrig!

Many Spectators. Friend? Friend?

The Officer. Lost, utterly lost! just when we looked
for Pym

To make a stand against the ill effects
Of the Earl's speech! Is Haselrig without?
Pym's message is to him.

3d Spec. Now, said I true?
Will the Earl leave them yet at fault or no?

1st Spec. Never believe it, man! These notes of
Ruin the Earl. [Vane's

5th Spec. A brave end: not a whit
Less firm, less Pym all over. Then, the Trial
Is closed. No — Strafford means to speak again?

An Officer. Stand back, there!

5th Spec. Why, the Earl is coming hither!
Before the court breaks up! His brother, look, —
You 'd say he deprecated some fierce act
In Strafford's mind just now.

An Officer. Stand back, I say!

2d Spec. Who's the veiled woman that he talks
with?

Many Spectators. Hush —
The Earl! the Earl!

[Enter STRAFFORD, SLINGSBY, and other Secretaries, HOL-
LIS, Lady CARLISLE, MAXWELL, BALFOUR, etc. STRAF-
FORD converses with Lady CARLISLE.

Hol. So near the end! Be patient —
Return!

Straf. [To his Secretaries.] Here — anywhere — or,
't is freshest here!

To spend one's April here, the blossom-month !
Set it down here !

[They arrange a table, papers, etc.]

So, Pym can quail, can cower
Because I glance at him, yet more 's to do ?
What 's to be answered, Slingsby ? Let us end !
[To Lady CARLISLE.] Child, I refuse his offer ; what-
soe'er

It be ! Too late ! Tell me no word of him !
'T is something, Hollis, I assure you that —
To stand, sick as you are, some eighteen days
Fighting for life and fame against a pack
Of very curs, that lie thro' thick and thin,
Eat flesh and bread by wholesale, and can't say
"Strafford" if it would take my life !

Lady Car.

Be moved !

Glance at the paper !

Straf.

Already at my heels !

Pym's faulting bloodhounds scent the track again
Peace, child ! Now, Slingsby !

*[Messengers from LANE and other of STRAFFORD'S Counsel
within the Hall are coming and going during the Scene.]*

Straf. *[setting himself to write and dictate.]* I shall
beat you, Hollis !

Do you know that ? In spite of St. John's tricks,
In spite of Pym — your Pym who shrank from me !
Eliot would have contrived it otherwise.

[To a Messenger.] In truth ? This slip, tell Lane, con-
tains as much

As I can call to mind about the matter.

Eliot would have disdained . . .

[*Calling after the Messenger.*] And Radcliffe, say,
The only person who could answer Pym,
Is safe in prison, just for that.

Well, well !

It had not been recorded in that case,

I baffled you.

[*To Lady CARLISLE.*] Nay, child, why look so grieved?

All's gained without the King! You saw Pym quail?

What shall I do when they acquit me, think you,

But tranquilly resume my task as though

Nothing had intervened since I proposed

To call that traitor to account! Such tricks,

Trust me, shall not be played a second time,

Say, even against Laud, with his gray hair —

Your good work, Hollis! Peace! to make amends

You, Lucy, shall be there when I impeach

Pym and his fellows.

Hol.

Wherefore not protest

Against our whole proceeding, long ago?

Why feel indignant now? Why stand this while

Enduring patiently?

Straf.

Child, I'll tell you —

You, and not Pym — you, the slight graceful girl

Tall for a flowering lily, and not Hollis —

Why I stood patient! I was fool enough

To see the will of England in Pym's will,

To fear, myself had wronged her, and to wait

Her judgment, — when, behold, in place of it . . .

[*To a Messenger who whispers.*] Tell Lane to answer
no such question! Law, —

I grapple with their law! I'm here to try
My actions by their standard, not my own!
Their law allowed that levy: what's the rest
To Pym, or Lane, any but God and me?

Lady Car. The King's so weak! Secure this chance!

'T was Vane,

Never forget, who furnished Pym the notes . . .

Straf. Fit, — very fit, those precious notes of Vane,
To close the Trial worthily! I feared
Some spice of nobleness might linger yet
And spoil the character of all the Past.
Vane eased me . . and I will go back and say
As much — to Pym, to England! Follow me!
I have a word to say! There! my defence
Is done!

Stay! why be proud? Why care to own
My gladness, my surprise? — Nay, not surprise!
Wherefore insist upon the little pride
Of doing all myself, and sparing him
The pain? Child, say the triumph is my King's!
When Pym grew pale, and trembled, and sank down,
One image was before me: could I fail?
Child, care not for the Past, so indistinct,
Obscure — there's nothing to forgive in it
'T is so forgotten! From this day begins
A new life, founded on a new belief

In Charles.

Hol. In Charles? Rather, believe in Pym!
And here he comes in proof! Appeal to Pym!
Say how unfair . . .

Straf. To Pym? I would say nothing!
I would not look upon Pym's face again.

Lady Car. Stay, let me have to think I pressed your
hand!

[STRAFFORD and his friends go out.]

Enter HAMPDEN and VANE.

Vane. O Hampden, save that great misguided man!
Plead Strafford's cause with Pym! I have remarked
He moved no muscle when we all declaimed
Against him: you had but to breathe — he turned
Those kind, calm eyes upon you.

[*Enter PYM, the Solicitor-General St. JOHN, the Managers
of the Trial, FIENNES, RUDYARD, etc.*]

Rud. Horrible!

Till now all hearts were with you: I withdraw
For one. Too horrible! But we mistake
Your purpose, Pym: you cannot snatch away
The last spar from the drowning man.

Fien. He talks

With St. John of it — see, how quietly!
[*To other Presbyterians.*] You 'll join us? Strafford
may deserve the worst:

But this new course is monstrous. Vane, take heart!
This Bill of his Attainder shall not have
One true man's hand to it.

Vane. Consider, Pym !
Confront your Bill, your own Bill : what is it ?
You cannot catch the Earl on any charge, —
No man will say the law has hold of him
On any charge ; and therefore you resolve
To take the general sense on his desert,
As though no law existed, and we met
To found one. You refer to Parliament
To speak its thought upon this hideous mass
Of half-borne out assertions, dubious hints
Hereafter to be cleared, distortions — ay,
And wild inventions. Every man is saved
The task of fixing any single charge
On Strafford : he has but to see in him
The enemy of England.

Pym. A right scruple !
I have heard some called England's enemy
With less consideration.

Vane. Pity me !
Indeed you made me think I was your friend !
I who have murdered Strafford, how remove
That memory from me ?

Pym. I absolve you, Vane.
Take you no care for aught that you have done !

Vane. John Hampden, not this Bill ! Reject this
Bill !

He staggers through the ordeal : let him go,
Strew no fresh fire before him ! Plead for us !
When Strafford spoke, your eyes were thick with tears !

Hamp. England speaks louder : who are we, to play
The generous pardoner at her expense,
Magnanimously waive advantages,
And, if he conquer us, applaud his skill ?

Vane. He was your friend.

Pym. I have heard that before.

Fien. And England trusts you.

Hamp. Shame be his, who turns
The opportunity of serving her
She trusts him with, to his own mean account —
Who would look nobly frank at her expense !

Fien. I never thought it could have come to this.

Pym. But I have made myself familiar, Fiennes,
With this one thought — have walked, and sat, and
slept,

This thought before me. I have done such things,
Being the chosen man that should destroy
The traitor. You have taken up this thought
To play with, for a gentle stimulant,
To give a dignity to idler life
By the dim prospect of emprise to come,
But ever with the softening, sure belief,
That all would end some strange way right at last.

Fien. Had we made out some weightier charge !

Pym. You say

That these are petty charges : can we come
To the real charge at all ? There he is safe
In tyranny's stronghold. Apostasy
Is not a crime, treachery not a crime :

The cheek burns, the blood tingles, when you speak
The words, but where 's the power to take revenge
Upon them? We must make occasion serve, —
The oversight here, pay for the main sin
That mocks us.

Rud. But this unexampled course,
This Bill!

Pym. By this, we roll the clouds away
Of precedent and custom, and at once
Bid the great beacon-light God sets in all,
The conscience of each bosom, shine upon
The guilt of Strafford: each shall lay his hand
Upon his breast, and judge.

Vane. I only see
Strafford, nor pass his corpse for all beyond!

Rud. and others. Forgive him! He would join us, now
he finds

What the King counts reward! The pardon, too,
Should be your own. Yourself should bear to Strafford
The pardon of the Commons.

Pym. Meet him? Strafford?
Have we to meet once more, then? Be it so!
And yet — the prophecy seemed half fulfilled
When, at the Trial, as he gazed, my youth,
Our friendship, divers thoughts came back at once
And left me, for a time . . . 'T is very sad!
To-morrow we discuss the points of law
With Lane — to-morrow?

Vane. Not before to-morrow —

Pym. The next day, Haselrig, you introduce
The Bill of his Attainder. Pray for me!

The KING.

We have done

She tarries long.

The scheme —

Well, Carlisle ?

Pym. Fear me not, sir: — my mission is to save,
This time.

Pym. It is of Strafford I would speak.

Of Strafford ! I have heard too much from you.

Pym. I spoke, sir, for the People : will you hear
A word upon my own account ?

Cha. Of Strafford ?
(So, turns the tide already ? Have we tamed
The insolent brawler ? — Strafford's eloquence
Is swift in its effect.) Lord Strafford, sir,
Has spoken for himself.

Pym. Sufficiently.
I would apprise you of the novel course
The People take : the Trial fails.

Cha. Yes — yes —
We are aware, sir : for your part in it
Means shall be found to thank you.

Pym. Pray you, read
This schedule ! I would learn from your own mouth
— (It is a matter much concerning me) —
Whether, if two Estates of us concede
The death of Strafford, on the grounds set forth
Within that parchment, you, sir, can resolve
To grant your own consent to it. That Bill
Is framed by me. If you determine, sir,
That England's manifested will should guide
Your judgment, ere another week such will
Shall manifest itself. If not, — I cast
Aside the measure.

Cha. You can hinder, then,
The introduction of this Bill ?

Pym. I can.

Cha. He is my friend, sir : I have wronged him :
mark you,

Had I not wronged him, this might be. You think
Because you hate the Earl . . . (turn not away,
We know you hate him) — no one else could love
Strafford: but he has saved me, some affirm.
Think of his pride! And, do you know one strange,
One frightful thing? We all have used the man
As though a drudge of ours, with not a source
Of happy thoughts except in us; and yet
Strafford has wife and children, household cares,
Just as if we had never been. Ah, sir,
You are moved, even you, a solitary man
Wed to your cause — to England if you will!

Pym. Yes — think, my soul — to England! Draw
not back!

Cha. Prevent that Bill, sir! All your course seems
fair

Till now. Why, in the end, 'tis I should sign
The warrant for his death! You have said much
I ponder on; I never meant, indeed,
Strafford should serve me any more. I take
The Commons' counsel; but this Bill is yours —
Nor worthy of its leader: care not, sir,
For that, however! I will quite forget
You named it to me. You are satisfied?

Pym. Listen to me, sir! Eliot laid his hand,
Wasted and white, upon my forehead once;
Wentworth — he's gone now! — has talked on, whole
nights,
And I beside him; Hampden loves me: sir,

How can I breathe and not wish England well,
And her King well ?

Cha. I thank you, sir ! who leave
That King his servant. Thanks, sir !

Pym. Let me speak !
— Who may not speak again ; whose spirit yearns
For a cool night after this weary day :
— Who would not have my soul turn sicker yet
In a new task, more fatal, more august,
More full of England's utter weal or woe.
I thought, sir, could I find myself with you,
After this Trial, alone, as man to man —
I might say something, warn you, pray you, save —
Mark me, King Charles, save —— you !
But God must do it. Yet I warn you, sir —
(With Strafford's faded eyes yet full on me)
As you would have no deeper question moved
— “How long the Many must endure the One,”
Assure me, sir, if England give assent
To Strafford's death, you will not interfere !
Or ——

Cha. God forsakes me. I am in a net.
And cannot move. Let all be as you say !

Enter Lady CARLISLE.

Lady Car. He loves you — looking beautiful with joy
Because you sent me ! he would spare you all
The pain ! he never dreamed you would forsake
Your servant in the evil day — nay, see

Your scheme returned! That generous heart of his!
He needs it not — or, needing it, disdains
A course that might endanger you — you, sir,
Whom Strafford from his inmost soul . . .

[*Seeing Pym.*]

Well met!

No fear for Strafford! all that's true and brave
On your own side shall help us: we are now
Stronger than ever.

Ha — what, sir, is this?

All is not well! What parchment have you there?

Pym. Sir, much is saved us both.

Lady Car.

This Bill! Your lip

Whitens — you could not read one line to me
Your voice would falter so!

Pym.

No recreant yet!

The great word went from England to my soul,
And I arose. The end is very near.

Lady Car. I am to save him! All have shrunk
beside —

'T is only I am left! Heaven will make strong
The hand now as the heart. Then let both die!

ACT V.

SCENE I. — *Whitehall.*

HOLLIS, Lady CARLISLE.

Hol. Tell the King, then! Come in with me!*Lady Car.*

Not so!

He must not hear till it succeeds.

Hol.

Succeed?

No dream was half so vain — you'd rescue Strafford
And outwit Pym! I cannot tell you . . . lady,
The block pursues me, and the hideous show
To-day . . . is it to-day? And all the while
He's sure of the King's pardon. Think, I have
To tell this man he is to die. The King
May rend his hair, for me! I'll not see Strafford!

Lady Car. Only, if I succeed, remember — Charles
Has saved him! He would hardly value life
Unless his gift. My stanch friends wait. Go in —
You must go in to Charles!

Hol.

And all beside

Left Strafford long ago. The King has signed
The warrant for his death: the Queen was sick
Of the eternal subject. For the Court, —
The Trial was amusing in its way,
Only too much of it: the Earl withdrew
In time. But you, fragile, alone, so young,
Amid rude mercenaries — you devise

A plan to save him ! Even though it fails,
What shall reward you ?

Lady Car. I may go, you think,
To France with him ? And you reward me, friend,
Who lived with Strafford even from his youth
Before he set his heart on state-affairs
And they bent down that noble brow of his.
I have learned somewhat of his latter life,
And all the future I shall know : but, Hollis,
I ought to make his youth my own as well.
Tell me, — when he is saved !

Hol. My gentle friend,
He should know all and love you, but 't is vain !

Lady Car. Love ? no — too late now ! Let him love
the King !

'T is the King's scheme ! I have your word, remember !
We'll keep the old delusion up. But, quick !
Quick ! Each of us has work to do, beside !
Go to the King ! I hope — Hollis — I hope !
Say nothing of my scheme ! Hush, while we speak
Think where he is ! Now for my gallant friends !

Hol. Where he is ? * Calling wildly upon Charles,
Guessing his fate, pacing the prison-floor.
Let the King tell him ! I'll not look on Strafford.

SCENE II. — *The Tower.*STRAFFORD *sitting with his Children. They sing.*

*O bell' andare
 Per barca in mare,
 Verso la sera
 Di Primavera !*

William. The boat's in the broad moonlight all this
 while —

*Verso la sera
 Di Primavera !*

And the boat shoots from underneath the moon
 Into the shadowy distance ; only still
 You hear the dipping oar —

Verso la sera,

And faint, and fainter, and then all's quite gone,
 Music and light and all, like a lost star.

Anne. But you should sleep, father : you were to
 sleep.

Straf. I do sleep, Anne ; or if not — you must know
 There's such a thing as . . .

Wil. You're too tired to sleep ?

Straf. It will come by and by and all day long,
 In that old quiet house I told you of :
 We sleep safe there.

Anne. Why not in Ireland ?

Straf. No !

Too many dreams ! — That song's for Venice, William :

You know how Venice looks upon the map —
Isles that the mainland hardly can let go?

Wil. You've been to Venice, father?

Straf. I was young then.

Wil. A city with no King; that's why I like
Even a song that comes from Venice.

Straf. William!

Wil. Oh, I know why! Anne, do you love the
King?

But I'll see Venice for myself one day.

Straf. See many lands, boy — England last of all, —
That way you'll love her best.

Wil. Why do men say
You sought to ruin her, then?

Straf. Ah, — they say that.

Wil. Why?

Straf. I suppose they must have words to say,
As you to sing.

Anne. But they make songs beside:
Last night I heard one, in the street beneath,
That called you . . . Oh, the names!

Wil. Don't mind her, father!
They soon left off when I cried out to them.

Straf. We shall so soon be out of it, my boy!
'Tis not worth while: who heeds a foolish song?

Wil. Why, not the King.

Straf. Well: it has been the fate
Of better; and yet, — wherefore not feel sure
That Time, who in the twilight comes to mend

All the fantastic day's caprice, consign
 To the low ground once more the ignoble Term,
 And raise the Genius on his orb again, —
 That Time will do me right?

Anne. (Shall we sing, William?
 He does not look thus when we sing.)

Straf. For Ireland,
 Something is done: too little, but enough
 To show what might have been.

Wil. (I have no heart
 To sing now! Anne, how very sad he looks!
 Oh, I so hate the King for all he says!)

Straf. Forsook them! What, the common songs will

run
 That I forsook the People? Nothing more?
 Ay, Fame, the busy scribe, will pause, no doubt,
 Turning a deaf ear to her thousand slaves
 Noisy to be enrolled, — will register
 The curious glosses, subtle notices,
 Ingenious clearings-up one fain would see
 Beside that plain inscription of The Name —
 The Patriot Pym, or the Apostate Strafford!

[*The children resume their song timidly, but break off.*

Enter HOLLIS and an Attendant.

Straf. No, — Hollis? in good time! — Who is he?
Hol. One
 That must be present.

Straf. Ah — I understand.
 They will not let me see poor Laud alone.

How politic ! They 'd use me by degrees
To solitude : and just as you came in
I was solicitous what life to lead
When Strafford 's "not so much as Constable
In the King's service." Is there any means
To keep one's self awake ? What would you do
After this bustle, Hollis, in my place ?

Hol. Strafford !

Straf. Observe, not but that Pym and you
Will find me news enough — news I shall hear
Under a quince-tree by a fish-pond side
At Wentworth. Garrard must be re-engaged
My newsman. Or, a better project now —
What if when all's consummated, and the Saints
Reign, and the Senate's work goes swimmingly, —
What if I venture up, some day, unseen,
To saunter through the Town, notice how Pym,
Your Tribune, likes Whitehall, drop quietly
Into a tavern, hear a point discussed,
As, whether Strafford's name were John or James —
And be myself appealed to — I, who shall
Myself have near forgotten !

Hol. I would speak . . .

Straf. Then you shall speak, — not now : I want just
now,
To hear the sound of my own tongue. This place
Is full of ghosts.

Hol. Nay, you must hear me, Strafford !

Straf. Oh, readily ! Only, one rare thing more, —

The minister! Who will advise the King,
Turn his Sejanus, Richelieu, and what not,
And yet have health — children, for aught I know —
My patient pair of traitors! Ah, — but, William —
Does not his cheek grow thin?

Wil. 'Tis you look thin,
Father!

Straf. A scamper o'er the breezy wolds
Sets all to-rights.

Hol. You cannot sure forget
A prison-roof is o'er you, Strafford?

Straf. No,
Why, no. I would not touch on that, the first.
I left you that. Well, Hollis? Say at once,
The King can find no time to set me free!
A mask at Theobalds?

Hol. Hold: no such affair
Detains him.

Straf. True: what needs so great a matter?
The Queen's lip may be sore. Well: when he pleases, —
Only, I want the air: it vexes flesh
To be pent up so long.

Hol. The King — I bear
His message, Strafford: pray you, let me speak!

Straf. Go, William! Anne, try o'er your song again!

[*The children retire.*]

They shall be loyal, friend, at all events.
I know your message: you have nothing new
To tell me: from the first I guessed as much.

I know, instead of coming here himself
 Leading me forth in public by the hand,
 The King prefers to leave the door ajar
 As though I were escaping — bids me trudge
 While the mob gapes upon some show prepared
 On the other side of the river! Give at once
 His order of release! I've heard, as well,
 Of certain poor manœuvrings to avoid
 The granting pardon at his proper risk;
 First, he must prattle somewhat to the Lords,
 Must talk a trifle with the Commons first,
 Be grieved I should abuse his confidence,
 And far from blaming them, and . . . Where's the
 order?

Hol. Spare me!

Straf. Why, he'd not have me steal away?
 With an old doublet and a steeple hat
 Like Prynne's? Be smuggled into France, perhaps?
 Hollis, 't is for my children! 'T was for them
 I first consented to stand day by day
 And give your Puritans the best of words,
 Be patient, speak when called upon, observe
 Their rules, and not return them prompt their lie!
 What's in that boy of mine that he should prove
 Son to a prison-breaker? I shall stay
 And he'll stay with me. Charles should know as
 much —

He too has children!

[*Turning to HOLLIS's companion.*] Sir, you feel for me!

No need to hide that face! Though it have looked
Upon me from the judgment-seat . . . I know
Strangely, that somewhere it has looked on me . . .
Your coming has my pardon, nay, my thanks.
For there is One who comes not.

Hol. Whom forgive,
As one to die!

Straf. True, all die, and all need
Forgiveness: I forgive him from my soul.

Hol. 'T is a world's wonder: Strafford, you must
die!

Straf. Sir, if your errand is to set me free
This heartless jest mars much. Ha! Tears in truth?
We'll end this! See this paper, warm — feel — warm
With lying next my heart! Whose hand is there?
Whose promise? Read, and loud for God to hear!
"Strafford shall take no hurt" — read it, I say!
"In person, honor, nor estate" —

Hol. The King . . .

Straf. I could unking him by a breath! You sit
Where Loudon sat, who came to prophesy
The certain end, and offer me Pym's grace
If I'd renounce the King: and I stood firm
On the King's faith. The King who lives . . .

Hol. To sign
The warrant for your death.

Straf. "Put not your trust
In princes, neither in the sons of men,
In whom is no salvation!"

Hol. Trust in God.

The scaffold is prepared : they wait for you :
He has consented. Cast the earth behind !

Cha. You would not see me, Strafford, at your foot !
It was wrung from me ! Only curse me not !

Hol. [*To STRAFFORD.*] As you hope grace and pardon in your need,
Be merciful to this most wretched man !

[*Voices from within.*

Verso la sera

Di Primavera.

Straf. You'll be good to those children, sir ? I know
You'll not believe her, even should the Queen
Think they take after one they rarely saw.
I had intended that my son should live
A stranger to these matters : but you are
So utterly deprived of friends ! He too
Must serve you — will you not be good to him ?
Or, stay, sir, do not promise — do not swear !
You, Hollis — do the best you can for me !
I've not a soul to trust to : Wandesford's dead,
And you've got Radcliffe safe, Laud's turn comes next :
I've found small time of late for my affairs,
But I trust any of you, Pym himself —
No one could hurt them : there's an infant, too —
These tedious cares ! Your Majesty could spare them !
Nay — pardon me, my King ! I had forgotten
Your education, trials, much temptation,
Some weakness : there escaped a peevish word —

'T is gone : I bless you at the last. You know
All's between you and me : what has the world
To do with it? Farewell!

Cha. [*at the door.*] Balfour! Balfour!

Enter BALFOUR.

The Parliament! — go to them : I grant all
Demands. Their sittings shall be permanent :
Tell them to keep their money if they will :
I'll come to them for every coat I wear
And every crust I eat : only I choose
To pardon Strafford. As the Queen shall choose!
— You never heard the People howl for blood,
Beside!

Bal. Your Majesty may hear them now :
The walls can hardly keep their murmurs out :
Please you retire!

Cha. Take all the troops, Balfour!

Bal. There are some hundred thousand of the crowd.

Cha. Come with me, Strafford! You'll not fear, at
least!

Straf. Balfour, say nothing to the world of this!
I charge you, as a dying man, forget
You gazed upon this agony of one . . .
Of one . . . or if . . . why you may say, Balfour,
The King was sorry : 't is no shame in him :
Yes, you may say he even wept, Balfour,
And that I walked the lighter to the block
Because of it. I shall walk lightly, sir!
Earth fades, Heaven breaks on me : I shall stand next

Before God's throne : the moment's close at hand
 When Man the first, last time, has leave to lay
 His whole heart bare before its Maker, leave
 To clear up the long error of a life
 And choose one happiness for evermore.
 With all mortality about me, Charles,
 The sudden wreck, the dregs of violent death —
 What if, despite the opening angel-song,
 There penetrate one prayer for you? Be saved
 Through me! Bear witness, no one could prevent
 My death! Lead on! ere he awake — best, now!
 All must be ready: did you say, Balfour,
 The crowd began to murmur? They'll be kept
 Too late for sermon at St. Antholin's!
 Now! but tread softly — children are at play
 In the next room. Precede! I follow —

Enter Lady CARLISLE, with many Attendants.

Lady Car.

Me!

Follow me, Strafford, and be saved! The King?
 [*To the KING.*] Well — as you ordered, they are ranged
 without,

The convoy . . . [*seeing the KING's state.*]

[*To STRAFFORD.*] You know all, then! Why, I
 thought

It looked best that the King should save you, Charles
 Alone; 't is shame that you should owe me aught.
 Or, no, not shame! Strafford, you'll not feel shame
 At being saved by me?

Hol.

All true! O Strafford,

She saves you ! all her deed ! this lady's deed !
And is the boat in readiness ? You, friend,
Are Billingsley, no doubt ! Speak to her, Strafford !
See how she trembles, waiting for your voice !
The world's to learn its bravest story yet !

Lady Car. Talk afterward ! Long nights in France
enough,

To sit beneath the vines and talk of home !

Straf. You love me, child ! Ah, Strafford can be loved
As well as Vane ! I could escape, then ?

Lady Car.

Haste !

Advance the torches, Bryan !

Straf.

I will die.

They call me proud : but England had no right,
When she encountered me — her strength to mine —
To find the chosen foe a craven. Girl,
I fought her to the utterance, I fell,
I am hers now, and I will die. Beside,
The lookers-on ! Eliot is all about
This place with his most uncomplaining brow.

Lady Car. Strafford !

Straf.

I think if you could know how much
I love you, you would be repaid, my friend !

Lady Car. Then, for my sake !

Straf.

Even for your sweet sake,
I stay.

Hol. For *their* sake !

Straf.

To bequeath a stain ?
Leave me ! Girl, humor me and let me die !

Lady Car. Bid him escape — wake, King! Bid him escape!

Straf. True, I will go! Die, and forsake the King?
I'll not draw back from the last service.

Lady Car. Strafford!

Straf. And, after all, what is disgrace to me?
Let us come, child! That it should end this way!
Lead then! but I feel strangely: it was not
To end this way.

Lady Car. Lean — lean on me!

Straf. My King!
Oh, had he trusted me — his friend of friends! —

Lady Car. I can support him, Hollis!

Straf. Not this way!
This gate — I dreamed of it, this very gate.

Lady Car. It opens on the river: our good boat
Is moored below, our friends are there.

Straf. The same.
Only with something ominous and dark,
Fatal, inevitable.

Lady Car. Strafford! Strafford!

Straf. Not by this gate! I feel what will be there!
I dreamed of it, I tell you: touch it not!

Lady Car. To save the King, — Strafford, to save the
King!

[As STRAFFORD opens the door, PYM is discovered with
HAMPDEN, VANE, etc. STRAFFORD falls back: PYM
follows slowly and confronts him.]

Pym. Have I done well? Speak, England! Whose
sole sake

I still have labored for, with disregard
To my own heart, — for whom my youth was made
Barren, my Future waste, to offer up
Her sacrifice — this man, this Wentworth here —
Who walked in youth with me, loved me, it may be,
And whom, for his forsaking England's cause,
I hunted by all means (trusting that she
Would sanctify all means) even to the block
Which waits for him. And saying this, I feel
No bitterer pang than first I felt, the hour
I swore that Wentworth might leave us, but I
Would never leave him : I do leave him now.
I render up my charge (be witness, God !)
To England who imposed it. I have done
Her bidding — poorly, wrongly, — it may be,
With ill effects — for I am weak, a man :
Still, I have done my best, my human best,
Not faltering for a moment. It is done.
And this said, if I say . . . yes, I will say
I never loved but one man — David not
More Jonathan ! Even thus, I love him now :
And look for my chief portion in that world
Where great hearts led astray are turned again,
(Soon it may be, and, certes, will be soon :
My mission over, I shall not live long.) —
Ay, here I know I talk — I dare and must,
Of England, and her great reward, as all
I look for there ; but in my inmost heart,
Believe, I think of stealing quite away

To walk once more with Wentworth — my youth's friend
 Purged from all error, gloriously renewed,
 And Eliot shall not blame us. Then indeed . . .
 This is no meeting, Wentworth! Tears increase
 Too hot. A thin mist — is it blood? — enwraps
 The face I loved once. Then, the meeting be!

Straf. I have loved England too; we'll meet then,
 Pym!

As well die now! Youth is the only time
 To think and to decide on a great course:
 Manhood with action follows; but 't is dreary
 To have to alter our whole life in age —
 The time past, the strength gone! as well die now.
 When we meet, Pym, I'd be set right — not now!
 Best die. Then if there's any fault, it too
 Dies, smothered up. Poor gray old little Laud
 May dream his dream out of a perfect Church
 In some blind corner. And there's no one left.
 I trust the King now wholly to you, Pym!
 And yet, I know not! I shall not be there!
 Friends fail — if he have any! And he's weak,
 And loves the Queen, and . . . O, my fate is nothing —
 Nothing! But not that awful head — not that!
 Pym, you help England! I, that am to die,
 What I must see! 't is here — all here! My God!
 Let me but gasp out, in one word of fire,
 How Thou wilt plague him, satiating Hell!
 What? England that you help, become through you
 A green and putrefying charnel, left

Our children . . . some of us have children, Pym —
Some who, without that, still must ever wear
A darkened brow, an over-serious look,
And never properly be young! No word?
You will not say a word — to me — to Him?

Pym. England, — I am thine own! Dost thou exact
That service? I obey thee to the end.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY.

FLORENCE, 1850.

CHRISTMAS-EVE.



I.

Out of the little chapel I flung,
Into the fresh night-air again.
Five minutes I waited, held my tongue
In the doorway, to escape the rain
That drove in gusts down the common's centre,
At the edge of which the chapel stands,
Before I plucked up heart to enter.
Heaven knows how many sorts of hands
Reached past me, groping for the latch
Of the inner door that hung on catch,
More obstinate the more they fumbled,
Till, giving way at last with a scold
Of the crazy hinge, in squeezed or tumbled
One sheep more to the rest in fold,
And left me irresolute, standing sentry
In the sheepfold's lath-and-plaster entry,
Four feet long by two feet wide,
Partitioned off from the vast inside —
I blocked up half of it at least.
No remedy; the rain kept driving.
They eyed me much as some wild beast,

That congregation, still arriving,
Some of them by the main road, white
A long way past me into the night,
Skirting the common, then diverging ;
Not a few suddenly emerging
From the common's self thro' the paling-gaps,
— They house in the gravel-pits perhaps,
Where the road stops short with its safeguard border
Of lamps, as tired of such disorder ; —
But the most turned in yet more abruptly
From a certain squalid knot of alleys,
Where the town's bad blood once slept corruptly,
Which now the little chapel rallies
And leads into day again, — its priestliness
Lending itself to hide their beastliness
So cleverly (thanks in part to the mason),
And putting so cheery a whitewashed face on
Those neophytes too much in lack of it,
That, where you cross the common as I did,
And meet the party thus presided,
“Mount Zion” with Love-lane at the back of it,
They front you as little disconcerted
As, bound for the hills, her fate averted,
And her wicked people made to mind him,
Lôt might have marched with Gomorrah behind him.

II.

Well, from the road, the lanes or the common,
In came the flock : the fat weary woman,

Panting and bewildered, down-clapping
Her umbrella with a mighty report,
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,
A wreck of whalebones ; then, with a snort,
Like a startled horse, at the interloper
(Who humbly knew himself improper,
But could not shrink up small enough)
— Round to the door, and in, — the gruff
Hinge's invariable scold
Making my very blood run cold.
Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered
On broken clogs, the many-tattered
Little old-faced, peaking, sister-turned-mother
Of the sickly babe she tried to smother
Somehow up, with its spotted face,
From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place ;
She too must stop, wring the poor ends dry
Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby
Her tribute to the door-mat, sopping
Already from my own clothes' dropping,
Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on ;
Then, stooping down to take off her pattens,
She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,
Planted together before her breast
And its babe, as good as a lance in rest.
Close on her heels, the dingy satins
Of a female something, past me flitted,
With lips as much too white, as a streak
Lay far too red on each hollow cheek ;

And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied
All that was left of a woman once,
Holding at least its tongue for the nonce.
Then a tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief,
With his jaw bound up in a handkerchief,
And eyelids screwed together tight,
Led himself in by some inner light.
And, except from him, from each that entered,
I got the same interrogation —
“What, you, the alien, you have ventured
To take with us, the elect, your station?
A carer for none of it, a Gallio?” —
Thus, plain as print, I read the glance
At a common prey, in each countenance
As of huntsmen giving his hounds the tallyho.
And, when the door’s cry drowned their wonder,
The draught, it always sent in shutting,
Made the flame of the single tallow candle
In the cracked square lantern I stood under,
Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting,
As it were, the luckless cause of scandal :
I verily fancied the zealous light,
(In the chapel’s secret, too !) for spite
Would shudder itself clean off the wick,
With the airs of a Saint John’s Candlestick.
There was no standing it much longer.
“Good folks,” thought I, as resolve grew stronger,
“This way you perform the Grand-Inquisitor,
When the weather sends you a chance visitor ?

You are the men, and wisdom shall die with you,
And none of the old Seven Churches vie with you !
But still, despite the pretty perfection
To which you carry your trick of exclusiveness,
And, taking God's word under wise protection,
Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,
And bid one reach it over hot ploughshares, —
Still, as I say, though you 've found salvation,
If I should choose to cry, as now, 'Shares' !—
See if the best of you bars me my ration !
I prefer, if you please, for my expounder
Of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder ;
Mine's the same right with your poorest and sickliest,
Supposing I don the marriage-vestment :
So, shut your mouth and open your Testament,
And carve me my portion at your quickest !”
Accordingly, as a shoemaker's lad
With wizened face in want of soap,
And wet apron wound round his waist like a rope,
(After stopping outside, for his cough was bad,
To get the fit over, poor gentle creature,
And so avoid disturbing the preacher)
— Passed in, I sent my elbow spikewise
At the shutting door, and entered likewise,
Received the hinge's accustomed greeting,
And crossed the threshold's magic pentacle,
And found myself in full conventicle,
— To wit, in Zion Chapel Meeting,
On the Christmas-Eve of 'Forty-nine,

Which, calling its flock to their special clover,
Found all assembled and one sheep over,
Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

III.

I very soon had enough of it.
The hot smell and the human noises,
And my neighbor's coat, the greasy cuff of it,
Were a pebble-stone that a child's hand poises,
Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure
Of the preaching-man's immense stupidity,
As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure,
To meet his audience's avidity.
You needed not the wit of the Sibyl
To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling :
No sooner got our friend an inkling
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible,
(Whene'er 't was that the thought first struck him,
How death, at unawares, might duck him
Deeper than the grave, and quench
The gin-shop's light in Hell's grim drench)
Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence,
As to hug the book of books to pieces :
And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,
Not improved by the private dog's-ears and creases,
Having clothed his own soul with, he'd fain see equipt
yours, —
So, tossed you again your Holy Scriptures.
And you picked them up, in a sense, no doubt :

Nay, had but a single face of my neighbors
Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labors
Were help which the world could be saved without,
'T is odds but I might have borne in quiet
A qualm or two at my spiritual diet,
Or (who can tell ?) perchance even mustered
Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon :
But the flock sat on, divinely flustered,
Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon
With such content in every snuffle,
As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.
My old fat woman purred with pleasure,
And thumb round thumb went twirling faster,
While she, to his periods keeping measure,
Maternally devoured the pastor.
The man with the handkerchief, untied it,
Showed us a horrible wen inside it,
Gave his eyelids yet another screwing,
And rocked himself as the woman was doing.
The shoemaker's lad, discreetly choking,
Kept down his cough. 'T was too provoking !
My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it,
So, saying, like Eve when she plucked the apple,
"I wanted a taste, and now there's enough of it,"
I flung out of the little chapel.

IV.

There was a lull in the rain, a lull
In the wind too ; the moon was risen,

And would have shone out pure and full,
But for the ramparted cloud-prison,
Block on block built up in the West,
For what purpose the wind knows best,
Who changes his mind continually.
And the empty other half of the sky
Seemed in its silence as if it knew
What, any moment, might look through
A chance-gap in that fortress massy : —
Through its fissures you got hints
Of the flying moon, by the shifting tints,
Now, a dull lion-color, now, brassy
Burning to yellow, and whitest yellow,
Like furnace-smoke just ere the flames bellow,
All a-simmer with intense strain
To let her through, — then blank again,
At the hope of her appearance failing.
Just by the chapel, a break in the railing
Shows a narrow path directly across ;
'T is ever dry walking there, on the moss —
Besides, you go gently all the way uphill.
I stooped under and soon felt better ;
My head grew light, my limbs more supple,
As I walked on, glad to have slipt the fetter.
My mind was full of the scene I had left,
That placid flock, that pastor vociferant,
— How this outside was pure and different !
The sermon, now — what a mingled weft
Of good and ill ! were either less,

Its fellow had colored the whole distinctly ;
But alas for the excellent earnestness,
And the truths, quite true if stated succinctly,
But as surely false, in their quaint presentment,
However to pastor and flock's contentment !
Say rather, such truths looked false to your eyes,
With his provings and parallels twisted and twined,
Till how could you know them, grown double their size
In the natural fog of the good man's mind,
Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps
Haloed about with the common's damps ?
Truth remains true, the fault's in the prover ;
The zeal was good, and the aspiration ;
And yet, and yet, yet, fifty times over,
Pharaoh received no demonstration
By his Baker's dream of Baskets Three,
Of the doctrine of the Trinity, —
Although, as our preacher thus embellished it,
Apparently his hearers relished it
With so unfeigned a gust — who knows if
They did not prefer our friend to Joseph ?
But so it is everywhere, one way with all of them !
These people have really felt, no doubt,
A something, the motion they style the Call of them ;
And this is their method of bringing about,
By a mechanism of words and tones,
(So many texts in so many groans)
A sort of reviving or reproducing,
More or less perfectly, (who can tell ? —)

Of the mood itself, that strengthens by using ;
And how it happens, I understand well.
A tune was born in my head last week,
Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek
Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester ;
And when, next week, I take it back again,
My head will sing to the engine's clack again,
While it only makes my neighbor's haunches stir,
— Finding no dormant musical sprout
In him, as in me, to be jolted out.
'Tis the taught already that profits by teaching ;
He gets no more from the railway's preaching
Than, from this preacher who does the rail's office, I ;
Whom therefore the flock cast a jealous eye on.
Still, why paint over their door "Mount Zion,"
To which all flesh shall come, saith the prophecy ?

v.

But wherefore be harsh on a single case ?
After how many modes, this Christmas-Eve,
Does the selfsame weary thing take place ?
The same endeavor to make you believe,
And with much the same effect, no more :
Each method abundantly convincing,
As I say, to those convinced before,
But scarce to be swallowed without wincing,
By the not-as-yet-convinced. For me,
I have my own church equally :
And in *this* church my faith sprang first !

(I said, as I reached the rising ground,
And the wind began again, with a burst
Of rain in my face, and a glad rebound
From the heart beneath, as if, God speeding me,
I entered His church-door, Nature leading me)
— In youth I looked to these very skies,
And probing their immensities,
I found God there, His visible power ;
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense
Of that power, an equal evidence
That His love, there too, was the nobler dower.
For the loving worm within its clod,
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.
You know what I mean : God 's all, man 's naught :
But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were, a handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live,
And look at Him from a place apart,
And use His gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep forever.
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, " But all is God's " — whose plan
Was to create man and then leave him
Able, His own word saith, to grieve Him,
But able to glorify Him too,
As a mere machine could never do,

That prayed or praised, all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,
Made perfect as a thing of course.
Man, therefore, stands on his own stock
Of love and power as a pin-point rock,
And, looking to God who ordained divorce
Of the rock from His boundless continent,
Sees, in His power made evident,
Only excess by a million-fold
O'er the power God gave man in the mould.
For, note : man's hand, first formed to carry
A few pounds' weight, when taught to marry
Its strength with an engine's, lifts a mountain,
— Advancing in power by one degree ;
And why count steps through eternity ?
But love is the ever-springing fountain :
Man may enlarge or narrow his bed
For the water's play, but the water-head —
How can he multiply or reduce it ?
As easy create it, as cause it to cease ;
He may profit by it, or abuse it,
But 't is not a thing to bear increase
As power does : be love less or more
In the heart of man, he keeps it shut
Or opes it wide, as he pleases, but
Love's sum remains what it was before.
So, gazing up, in my youth, at love
As seen through power, ever above
All modes which make it manifest,

My soul brought all to a single test —
That He, the Eternal First and Last,
Who, in His power, had so surpassed
All man conceives of what is might, —
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,
— Would prove as infinitely good ;
Would never, (my soul understood,)
With power to work all love desires,
Bestow e'en less than man requires :
That He who endlessly was teaching,
Above my spirit's utmost reaching,
What love can do in the leaf or stone,
(So that to master this alone,
This done in the stone or leaf for me,
I must go on learning endlessly)
Would never need that I, in turn,
Should point him out a defect unheeded,
And show that God had yet to learn
What the meanest human creature needed, —
— Not life, to wit, for a few short years,
Tracking His way through doubts and fears,
While the stupid earth on which I stay
Suffers no change, but passive adds
Its myriad years to myriads,
Though I, He gave it to, decay,
Seeing death come and choose about me,
And my dearest ones depart without me.
No ! love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,
Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it,

The love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,
Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it !
And I shall behold Thee, face to face,
O God, and in Thy light retrace
How in all I loved here, still wast Thou !
Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,
I shall find as able to satiate
The love, Thy gift, as my spirit's wonder
Thou art able to quicken and sublimate,
With this sky of Thine, that I now walk under,
And glory in Thee for, as I gaze
Thus, thus ! oh, let men keep their ways
Of seeking Thee in a narrow shrine —
Be this my way ! And this *is* mine !

VI.

For lo, what think you ? suddenly
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.
The black cloud-barricade was riven,
Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
Deep in the West ; while, bare and breathless,
North and South and East lay ready
For a glorious Thing, that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them, and stood steady.
'T was a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face.

It rose, distinctly at the base
With its seven proper colors chorded,
Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
Until at last they coalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In a triumph of whitest white, —
Above which intervened the night.
But above night too, like only the next,
The second of a wondrous sequence,
Reaching in rare and rarer frequency,
Till the heaven of heavens were circumflect,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, flushier, and flightier, —
Rapture dying along its verge !
Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
WHOSE, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the keystone of that arc ?

VII.

This sight was shown me, there and then, —
Me, one out of a world of men,
Singled forth, as the chance might hap
To another, if in a thunderclap
Where I heard noise, and you saw flame,
Some one man knew God called his name.
For me, I think I said, “ Appear !
Good were it to be ever here.
If Thou wilt, let me build to Thee
Service tabernacles Three,

Where, forever in Thy presence,
In ecstatic acquiescence,
Far alike from thriftless learning
And ignorance's undiscerning,
I may worship and remain !”
Thus, at the show above me, gazing
With upturned eyes, I felt my brain
Glutted with the glory, blazing
Throughout its whole mass, over and under,
Until at length it burst asunder,
And out of it bodily there streamed
The too-much glory, as it seemed,
Passing from out me to the ground,
Then palely serpentining round
Into the dark with mazy error.

VIII.

All at once I looked up with terror.
He was there.
He Himself with His human air,
On the narrow pathway, just before.
I saw the back of Him, no more —
He had left the chapel, then, as I.
I forgot all about the sky.
No face : only the sight
Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognize.
I felt terror, no surprise :
My mind filled with the cataract,

At one bound, of the mighty fact.
I remembered, He did say
Doubtless, that, to this world's end,
Where two or three should meet and pray,
He would be in the midst, their friend :
Certainly He was there with them.
And my pulses leaped for joy
Of the golden thought without alloy,
That I saw His very vesture's hem.
Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear
With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear,
And I hastened, cried out while I pressed
To the salvation of the vest,
“ But not so, Lord ! It cannot be
That Thou, indeed, art leaving me —
Me, that have despised Thy friends.
Did my heart make no amends ?
Thou art the love of God — above
His power, didst hear me place His love,
And that was leaving the world for Thee.
Therefore Thou must not turn from me
As if I had chosen the other part.
Folly and pride o'ercame my heart.
Our best is bad, nor bears Thy test ;
Still, it should be our very best,
I thought it best that Thou, the Spirit,
Be worshipped in spirit and in truth,
And in beauty, as even we require it —
Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth,

I left but now, as scarcely fitted
For Thee : I knew not what I pitied.
But, all I felt there, right or wrong,
What is it to Thee, who carest sinning ?
Am I not weak as Thou art strong ?
I have looked to Thee from the beginning,
Straight up to Thee through all the world
Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled
To nothingness on either side :
And since the time Thou wast desried,
Spite of the weak heart, so have I
Lived ever, and so fain would die,
Living and dying, Thee before !
But if Thou leavest me — ”

IX.

Less or more,
I suppose that I spoke thus.
When, — have mercy, Lord, on us !
The whole Face turned upon me full.
And I spread myself beneath it,
As when the bleacher spreads, to seethe it
In the cleansing sun, his wool, —
Steeps in the flood of noontide whiteness
Some defiled, discolored web —
So lay I, saturate with brightness.
And when the flood appeared to ebb,
Lo, I was walking, light and swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,

But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On, just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion :
What shall I say ? — as a path were hollowed
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.
Darkness and cold were cloven, as through
I passed, upborne yet walking too.
And I turned to myself at intervals, —
“ So He said, and so it befalls.
God who registers the cup
Of mere cold water, for His sake
To a disciple rendered up,
Disdains not His own thirst to slake
At the poorest love was ever offered :
And because it was my heart I proffered,
With true love trembling at the brim,
He suffers me to follow Him
Forever, my own way, — dispensed
From seeking to be influenced
By all the less immediate ways
That earth, in worships manifold,
Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,
The garment's hem, which, lo, I hold ! ”

X.

And so we crossed the world and stopped.
For where am I, in city or plain,

Since I am 'ware of the world again?
And what is this that rises propped
With pillars of prodigious girth?
Is it really on the earth,
This miraculous Dome of God?
Has the angel's measuring-rod
Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,
'Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,
Meted it out, — and what he meted,
Have the sons of men completed?
— Binding, ever as he bade,
Columns in this colonnade
With arms wide open to embrace
The entry of the human race
To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,
Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding,
With marble for brick, and stones of price
For garniture of the edifice?
Now I see; it is no dream;
It stands there and it does not seem:
Forever, in pictures, thus it looks,
And thus I have read of it in books
Often in England, leagues away,
And wondered how these fountains play,
Growing up eternally
Each to a musical water-tree,
Whose blossoms drop, a glittering boon,
Before my eyes, in the light of the moon,
To the granite lavers underneath.

Liar and dreamer in your teeth !
I, the sinner that speak to you,
Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew
Both this and more. For see, for see,
The dark is rent, mine eye is free
To pierce the crust of the outer wall,
And I view inside, and all there, all,
As the swarming hollow of a hive,
The whole Basilica alive !
Men in the chancel, body, and nave,
Men on the pillars' architrave,
Men on the statues, men on the tombs
With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs,
All famishing in expectation
Of the main-altar's consummation.
For see, for see, the rapturous moment
Approaches, and earth's best endowment
Blends with Heaven's ; the taper-fires
Pant up, the winding brazen spires
Heave loftier yet the baldachin ;
The incense-gaspings, long kept in,
Suspire in clouds ; the organ blatant
Holds his breath and grovels latent,
As if God's hushing finger grazed him,
(Like Behemoth when He praised him)
At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,
Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling
On the sudden pavement strewed
With faces of the multitude.

Earth breaks up, time drops away,
In flows Heaven, with its new day
Of endless life, when He who trod,
Very Man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame and pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree, —
Shall come again, no more to be
Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, All in all,
King of kings, Lord of lords,
As His servant John received the words,
“I died, and live forevermore!”

XI.

Yet I was left outside the door.
Why sat I there on the threshold-stone,
Left till He return, alone
Save for the garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold? —
My reason, to my doubt, replied,
As if a book were opened wide,
And at a certain page I traced
Every record undefaced,
Added by successive years, —
The harvestings of truth's stray ears
Singly gleaned, and in one sheaf
Bound together for belief.
Yes, I said — that He will go

And sit with these in turn, I know.
Their faith's heart beats, though her head swims
Too giddily to guide her limbs,
Disabled by their palsy-stroke
From propping me. Though Rome's gross yoke
Drops off, no more to be endured,
Her teaching is not so obscured
By errors and perversities,
That no truth shines athwart the lies :
And He, whose eye detects a spark
Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark,
May well see flame where each beholder
Acknowledges the embers smoulder.
But I, a mere man, fear to quit
The clew God gave me as most fit
To guide my footsteps through life's maze,
Because Himself discerns all ways
Open to reach Him : I, a man
Able to mark where faith began
To swerve aside, till from its summit
Judgment drops her damning plummet,
Pronouncing such a fatal space
Departed from the Founder's base :
He will not bid me enter too,
But rather sit, as now I do,
Awaiting His return outside.
— 'T was thus my reason straight replied,
And joyously I turned, and pressed
The garment's skirt upon my breast,

Until, afresh its light suffusing me,
My heart cried, — what has been abusing me
That I should wait here lonely and coldly,
Instead of rising, entering boldly,
Baring truth's face, and letting drift
Her veils of lies as they choose to shift ?
Do these men praise Him ? I will raise
My voice up to their point of praise !
I see the error ; but above
The scope of error, see the love. —
O, love of those first Christian days !
— Fanned so soon into a blaze,
From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,
That the antique sovereign Intellect
Which then sat ruling in the world,
Like a change in dreams, was hurled
From the throne he reigned upon :
— You looked up, and he was gone !
Gone, his glory of the pen !
— Love, with Greece and Rome in ken,
Bade her scribes abhor the trick
Of poetry and rhetoric,
And exult, with hearts set free,
In blessed imbecility
Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet,
Leaving Sallust incomplete.
Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter !
— Love, while able to acquaint her
With the thousand statues yet

Fresh from chisel, pictures wet
From brush, she saw on every side,
Chose rather with an infant's pride
To frame those portents which impart
Such unction to true Christian Art.
Gone, music too! The air was stirred
By happy wings : Terpander's bird
(That, when the cold came, fled away)
Would tarry not the wintry day, —
As more-enduring sculpture must,
Till a filthy saint rebuked the gust
With which he chanced to get a sight
Of some dear naked Aphrodite
He glanced a thought above the toes of,
By breaking zealously her nose off.
Love, surely, from that music's lingering,
Might have filched her organ-fingering,
Nor chosen rather to set prayings
To hog-grunts, praises to horse-neighings.
Love was the startling thing, the new ;
Love was the all-sufficient too ;
And seeing that, you see the rest :
As a babe can find its mother's breast
As well in darkness as in light,
Love shut our eyes, and all seemed right.
True, the world's eyes are open now :
— Less need for me to disallow
Some few that keep Love's zone unbuckled,
Peevish as ever to be suckled,

Lulled by the same old baby-prattle
With intermixture of the rattle,
When she would have them creep, stand steady
Upon their feet, or walk already,
Not to speak of trying to climb.
I will be wise another time,
And not desire a wall between us,
When next I see a church-roof cover
So many species of one genus,
All with foreheads bearing *Lover*
Written above the earnest eyes of them ;
All with breasts that beat for beauty,
Whether sublimed, to the surprise of them,
In noble daring, steadfast duty,
The heroic in passion, or in action, —
Or, lowered for the senses' satisfaction,
To the mere outside of human creatures,
Mere perfect form and faultless features.
What? with all Rome here, whence to levy
Such contributions to their appetite,
With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,
They take, as it were, a padlock, and it tight
On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding
On the glories of their ancient reading,
On the beauties of their modern singing,
On the wonders of the builder's bringing,
On the majesties of Art around them, —
And, all these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them,

They offer up to God for a present?
Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it, —
And, only taking the act in reference
To the other recipients who might have allowed of it,
I will rejoice that God had the preference.

XII.

So I summed up my new resolves :
Too much love there can never be.
And where the intellect devolves
Its function on love exclusively,
I, a man who possesses both,
Will accept the provision, nothing loath,
— Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,
That my intellect may find its share.
And ponder, O soul, the while thou departest,
And see thou applaud the great heart of the artist,
Who, examining the capabilities
Of the block of marble he has to fashion
Into a type of thought or passion, —
Not always, using obvious facilities,
Shapes it, as any artist can,
Into a perfect symmetrical man,
Complete from head to foot of the life-size,
Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes, —
But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate
A Colossus by no means so easy to come at,
And uses the whole of his block for the bust,
Leaving the minds of the public to finish it,

Since cut it ruefully short he must :
On the face alone he expends his devotion,
He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it,
— Saying, “ Applaud me for this grand notion
Of what a face may be ! As for completing it
In breast and body and limbs, do *that*, you ! ”
All hail ! I fancy how, happily meeting it,
A trunk and legs would perfect the statue,
Could man carve so as to answer volition.
And how much nobler than petty cavils,
Were a hope to find, in my spirit-travels,
Some artist of another ambition,
Who having a block to carve, no bigger,
Has spent his power on the opposite quest,
And believed to begin at the feet was best —
For so may I see, ere I die, the whole figure !

XIII.

No sooner said than out in the night !
My heart beat lighter and more light :
And still, as before, I was walking swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion,
— What shall I say ? — as a path were hollowed,
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.

XIV.

Alone ! I am left alone once more —
(Save for the garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold)
Alone, beside the entrance-door
Of a sort of temple, — perhaps a college,
— Like nothing I ever saw before
At home in England, to my knowledge.
The tall, old, quaint, irregular town !
It may be . . . though *which*, I can't affirm . . . any
Of the famous middle-age towns of Germany ;
And this flight of stairs where I sit down,
Is it Halle, Weimar, Cassel, or Frankfort,
Or Göttingen, that I have to thank for 't ?
It may be Göttingen, — most likely.
Through the open door I catch obliquely
Glimpses of a lecture-hall ;
And not a bad assembly neither —
Ranged decent and symmetrical
On benches, waiting what 's to see there ;
Which, holding still by the vesture's hem,
I also resolve to see with them,
Cautious this time how I suffer to slip
The chance of joining in fellowship
With any that call themselves His friends,
As these folks do, I have a notion.
But hist — a buzzing and emotion !
All settle themselves, the while ascends

w

By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk,
Step by step, deliberate
Because of his cranium's over-freight,
Three parts sublime to one grotesque,
If I have proved an accurate guesser,
The hawk-nosed, high-cheek-boned Professor.
I felt at once as if there ran
A shoot of love from my heart to the man —
That sallow, virgin-minded, studious
Martyr to mild enthusiasm,
As he uttered a kind of cough-preludious
That woke my sympathetic spasm,
(Beside some spitting that made me sorry)
And stood, surveying his auditory
With a wan pure look, wellnigh celestial, —
Those blue eyes had survived so much !
While, under the foot they could not smutch,
Lay all the fleshly and the bestial.
Over he bowed, and arranged his notes,
Till the auditory's clearing of throats
Was done with, died into a silence ;
And, when each glance was upward sent,
Each bearded mouth composed intent,
And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence, —
He pushed back higher his spectacles,
Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells,
And giving his head of hair — a hake
Of undressed tow, for color and quantity —
One rapid and impatient shake,

(As our own young England adjusts a jaunty tie
When about to impart, on mature digestion,
Some thrilling view of the surplice-question)
— The Professor's grave voice, sweet though hoarse,
Broke into his Christmas-Eve's discourse.

XV.

And he began it by observing
How reason dictated that men
Should rectify the natural swerving,
By a reversion, now and then,
To the well-heads of knowledge, few
And far away, whence rolling grew
The life-stream wide whereat we drink,
Commingled, as we needs must think,
With waters alien to the source ;
To do which, aimed this eve's discourse :
Since, where could be a fitter time
For tracing backward to its prime,
This Christianity, this lake,
This reservoir, whereat we slake,
From one or other bank, our thirst?
So, he proposed inquiring first
Into the various sources whence
This Myth of Christ is derivable ;
Demanding from the evidence
(Since plainly no such life was liveable)
How these phenomena should class?
Whether 't were best opine Christ was,

Or never was at all, or whether
He was and was not, both together —
It matters little for the name,
So the Idea be left the same.
Only, for practical purpose' sake
'T was obviously as well to take
The popular story, — understanding
How the ineptitude of the time,
And the penman's prejudice, expanding
Fact into fable fit for the clime,
Had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it
Into this myth, this Individuum, —
Which, when reason had strained and abated it
Of foreign matter, gave, for residuum,
A Man! — a right true man, however,
Whose work was worthy a man's endeavor;
Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient
To his disciples, for rather believing
He was just omnipotent and omniscient,
As it gives to us, for as frankly receiving
His word, their tradition, — which, though it meant
Something entirely different
From all that those who only heard it,
In their simplicity thought and averred it,
Had yet a meaning quite as respectable:
For, among other doctrines delectable,
Was he not surely the first to insist on
The natural sovereignty of our race? —
Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.

And while his cough, like a drouthy piston,
Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,
I seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him,
The vesture still within my hand.

XVI.

I could interpret its command.
This time He would not bid me enter
The exhausted air-bell of the Critic.
Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic
When Papist struggles with Dissenter,
Impregnating its pristine clarity,
— One, by his daily fare's vulgarity,
Its gust of broken meat and garlic ;
— One, by his soul's too-much presuming
To turn the frankincense's fuming
And vapors of the candle starlike
Into the cloud her wings she buoys on.
Each, that thus sets the pure air seething,
May poison it for healthy breathing —
But the Critic leaves no air to poison ;
Pumps out by a ruthless ingenuity
Atom by atom, and leaves you — vacuity.
Thus much of Christ, does he reject ?
And what retain ? His intellect ?
What is it I must reverence duly ?
Poor intellect for worship, truly,
Which tells me simply what was told
(If mere morality, bereft

Of the God in Christ, be all that's left)
Elsewhere by voices manifold ;
With this advantage, that the stater
Made nowise the important stumble
Of adding, he, the sage and humble,
Was also one with the Creator.
You urge Christ's followers' simplicity :
But how does shifting blame, evade it ?
Have wisdom's words no more felicity ?
The stumbling-block, His speech — who laid it ?
How comes it that for one found able
To sift the truth of it from fable,
Millions believe it to the letter ?
Christ's goodness, then — does that fare better ?
Strange goodness, which upon the score
Of being goodness, the mere due
Of man to fellow-man, much more
To God, — should take another view
Of its possessor's privilege,
And bid him rule his race ! You pledge
Your fealty to such rule ? What, all —
From Heavenly John and Attic Paul,
And that brave weather-battered Peter
Whose stout faith only stood completer
For buffets, sinning to be pardoned,
As the more his hands hauled nets, they hardened, —
All, down to you, the man of men,
Professing here at Göttingen,
Compose Christ's flock ! They, you and I

Are sheep of a good man ! and why ?
The goodness, — how did he acquire it ?
Was it self-gained, did God inspire it ?
Choose which ; then tell me, on what ground
Should its possessor dare propound
His claim to rise o'er us an inch ?
Were goodness all some man's invention,
Who arbitrarily made mention
What we should follow, and where flinch, —
What qualities might take the style
Of right and wrong, — and had such guessing
Met with as general acquiescing
As graced the Alphabet erewhile,
When A got leave an Ox to be,
No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G, —
For thus inventing thing and title
Worship were that man's fit requital.
But if the common conscience must
Be ultimately judge, adjust
Its apt name to each quality
Already known, — I would decree
Worship for such mere demonstration
And simple work of nomenclature,
Only the day I praised, not Nature,
But Harvey, for the circulation.
I would praise such a Christ, with pride
And joy, that he, as none beside,
Had taught us how to keep the mind
God gave him, as God gave his kind,

Freer than they from fleshly taint :
I would call such a Christ our Saint,
As I declare our Poet, him
Whose insight makes all others dim :
A thousand poets pried at life,
And only one amid the strife
Rose to be Shakespeare : each shall take
His crown, I'd say, for the world's sake —
Though some objected — “ Had we seen
The heart and head of each, what screen
Was broken there to give them light,
While in ourselves it shuts the sight,
We should no more admire, perchance,
That these found truth out at a glance,
Than marvel how the bat discerns
Some pitch-dark cavern's fifty turns,
Led by a finer tact, a gift
He boasts, which other birds must shift
Without, and grope as best they can.”
No, freely I would praise the man, —
Nor one whit more, if he contended
That gift of his, from God, descended.
Ah, friend, what gift of man's does not ?
No nearer Something, by a jot,
Rise an infinity of Nothings
Than one : take Euclid for your teacher :
Distinguish kinds : do crownings, clothings,
Make that Creator which was creature ?
Multiply gifts upon his head,

And what, when all 's done, shall be said
But — the more gifted he, I ween !
That one 's made Christ, this other, Pilate,
And This might be all That has been, —
So what is there to frown or smile at ?
What is left for us, save, in growth
Of soul, to rise up, far past both,
From the gift looking to the Giver,
And from the cistern to the River,
And from the finite to Infinity,
And from man's dust to God's divinity ?

XVII.

Take all in a word : the truth in God's breast
Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed :
Though He is so bright and we so dim,
We are made in His image to witness Him ;
And were no eye in us to tell,
Instructed by no inner sense,
The light of Heaven from the dark of Hell,
That light would want its evidence, —
Though Justice, Good and Truth were still
Divine, if, by some demon's will,
Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed
Law through the worlds, and Right misnamed.
No mere exposition of morality
Made or in part or in totality,
Should win you to give it worship, therefore :
And, if no better proof you will care for,

— Whom do you count the worst man upon earth?
Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more
Of what Right is, than arrives at birth
In the best man's acts that we bow before :
This last *knows* better — true, but my fact is,
'T is one thing to know, and another to practise.
And thence I conclude that the real God-function
Is to furnish a motive and injunction
For practising what we know already.
And such an injunction and such a motive
As the God in Christ, do you waive, and “heady,
High-minded,” hang your tablet-votive
Outside the fane on a finger-post ?
Morality to the uttermost,
Supreme in Christ as we all confess,
Why need *we* prove would avail no jot
To make Him God, if God He were not ?
What is the point where Himself lays stress ?
Does the precept run “ Believe in Good,
In Justice, Truth, now understood
For the first time ” ? — or, “ Believe in ME,
Who lived and died, yet essentially
Am Lord of Life ” ? Whoever can take
The same to his heart and for mere love's sake
Conceive of the love, — that man obtains
A new truth ; no conviction gains
Of an old one only, made intense
By a fresh appeal to his faded sense.

XVIII.

Can it be that He stays inside?
Is the vesture left me to commune with?
Could my soul find aught to sing in tune with
Even at this lecture, if she tried?
O, let me at lowest sympathize
With the lurking drop of blood that lies
In the desiccated brain's white roots
Without a throb for Christ's attributes,
As the Lecturer makes his special boast!
If love's dead there, it has left a ghost.
Admire we, how from heart to brain
(Though to say so strike the doctors dumb)
One instinct rises and falls again,
Restoring the equilibrium.
And how when the Critic had done his best,
And the Pearl of Price, at reason's test,
Lay dust and ashes levigable
On the Professor's lecture-table;
When we looked for the inference and monition
That our faith, reduced to such a condition,
Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole,—
He bids us, when we least expect it,
Take back our faith,—if it be not just whole,
Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it,
Which fact pays the damage done rewardingly,
So, prize we our dust and ashes accordingly!
“Go home and venerate the Myth

I thus have experimented with —
This Man, continue to adore him
Rather than all who went before him,
And all who ever followed after !” —
Surely for this I may praise you, my brother !
Will you take the praise in tears or laughter ?
That ’s one point gained : can I compass another ?
Unlearned love was safe from spurning —
Can’t we respect your loveless learning ?
Let us at least give Learning honor !
What laurels had we showered upon her,
Girding her loins up to perturb
Our theory of the Middle Verb ;
Or Turk-like brandishing a scimitar
O’er anapæsts in comic-trimeter ;
Or curing the halt and maimed Iketides,
While we lounged on at our indebted ease :
Instead of which, a tricksy demon
Sets her at Titus or Philemon !
When Ignorance wags his ears of leather
And hates God’s word, ’t is altogether ;
Nor leaves he his congenial thistles
To go and browse on Paul’s Epistles.
— And you, the audience, who might ravage
The world wide, enviably savage,
Nor heed the cry of the retriever,
More than Herr Heine (before his fever), —
I do not tell a lie so arrant
As say my passion’s wings are furled up,

And, without the plainest Heavenly warrant,
I were ready and glad to give this world up —
But still, when you rub the brow meticulous,
And ponder the profit of turning holy
If not for God's, for your own sake solely,
— God forbid I should find you ridiculous !
Deduce from this lecture all that eases you,
Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you,
“ Christians,” — abhor the Deist's pravity, —
Go on, you shall no more move my gravity,
Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse
I find it in my heart to embarrass them
By hinting that their stick 's a mock horse,
And they really carry what they say carries them.

XIX.

So sat I talking with my mind.
I did not long to leave the door
And find a new church, as before,
But rather was quiet and inclined
To prolong and enjoy the gentle resting
From further tracking and trying and testing.
This tolerance is a genial mood !
(Said I, and a little pause ensued).
One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf,
And sees, each side, the good effects of it,
A value for religion's self,
A carelessness about the sects of it.
Let me enjoy my own conviction,

Not watch my neighbor's faith with fretfulness
Still spying there some dereliction
Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness !
Better a mild indifferentism,
Teaching that all our faiths (though duller
His shine through a dull spirit's prism)
Originally had one color —
Sending me on a pilgrimage
Through ancient and through modern times
To many peoples, various climes,
Where I may see Saint, Savage, Sage
Fuse their respective creeds in one
Before the general Father's throne !

XX.

— 'T was the horrible storm began afresh !
The black night caught me in his mesh
Whirled me up, and flung me prone.
I was left on the college-step alone.
I looked, and far there, ever fleeting
Far, far away, the receding gesture,
And looming of the lessening vesture ! —
Swept forward from my stupid hand,
While I watched my foolish heart expand
In the lazy glow of benevolence,
O'er the various modes of man's belief.
I sprang up with fear's vehemence.
— Needs must there be one way, our chief
Best way of worship : let me strive

To find it, and when found, contrive
My fellows also take their share !
This constitutes my earthly care :
God's is above it and distinct.
For I, a man, with men am linked,
And not a brute with brutes ; no gain
That I experience, must remain
Unshared : but should my best endeavor
To share it, fail — subsisteth ever
God's care above, and I exult
That God, by God's own ways occult,
May — doth, I will believe — bring back
All wanderers to a single track.
Meantime, I can but testify
God's care for me — no more, can I —
It is but for myself I *know* ;
The world rolls witnessing around me
Only to leave me as it found me ;
Men cry there, but my ear is slow :
Their races flourish or decay
— What boots it, while yon lucid way
Loaded with stars, divides the vault ?
But soon my soul repairs its fault
When, sharpening sense's hebetude,
She turns on my own life ! So viewed,
No mere mote's-breadth but teems immense
With witnessings of Providence :
And woe to me if when I look
Upon that record, the sole book

Unsealed to me, I take no heed
Of any warning that I read !
Have I been sure, this Christmas-Eve,
God's own hand did the rainbow weave,
Whereby the truth from heaven slid
Into my soul? — I cannot bid
The world admit He stooped to heal
My soul, as if in a thunder-peal
Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,
I only knew He named my name :
But what is the world to me, for sorrow
Or joy in its censure, when to-morrow
It drops the remark, with just-turned head
Then, on again — that man is dead ?
Yes, but for me — my name called, — drawn
As a conscript's lot from the lap's black yawn,
He has dipt into on a battle-dawn :
Bid out of life by a nod, a glance, —
Stumbling, mute-mazed, at nature's chance, —
With a rapid finger circled round,
Fixed to the first poor inch of ground
To fight from, where his foot was found ;
Whose ear but a minute since lay free
To the wide camp's buzz and gossipry —
Summoned, a solitary man,
To end his life where his life began,
From the safe glad rear, to the dreadful van !
Soul of mine, hadst thou caught and held
By the hem of the vesture ! —

XXI.

And I caught
At the flying robe, and unrepelled
Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
With warmth and wonder and delight,
God's mercy being infinite.
For scarce had the words escaped my tongue,
When, at a passionate bound, I sprung
Out of the wandering world of rain,
Into the little chapel again.

XXII.

How else was I found there, bolt upright
On my bench, as if I had never left it?
— Never flung out on the common at night
Nor met the storm and wedge-like cleft it,
Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,
Or the laboratory of the Professor!
For the Vision, *that* was true, I wist,
True as that heaven and earth exist.
There sat my friend, the yellow and tall,
With his neck and its wen in the selfsame place;
Yet my nearest neighbor's cheek showed gall,
She had slid away a contemptuous space:
And the old fat woman, late so placable,
Eyed me with symptoms, hardly mistakable,
Of her milk of kindness turning rancid.
In short a spectator might have fancied

That I had nodded betrayed by slumber,
Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly,
Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,
And woke up now at the tenth and lastly.
But again, could such a disgrace have happened?
Each friend at my elbow had surely nudged it;
And, as for the sermon, where did my nap end?
Unless I heard it, could I have judged it?
Could I report as I do at the close,
First, the preacher speaks through his nose:
Second, his gesture is too emphatic:
Thirdly, to wave what's pedagogic,
The subject-matter itself lacks logic:
Fourthly, the English is ungrammatic.
Great news! the preacher is found no Pascal,
Whom, if I pleased, I might to the task call
Of making square to a finite eye
The circle of infinity,
And find so all-but-just-succeeding!
Great news! the sermon proves no reading
Where bee-like in the flowers I may bury me,
Like Taylor's, the immortal Jeremy!
And now that I know the very worst of him,
What was it I thought to obtain at first of him?
Ha! Is God mocked, as He asks?
Shall I take on me to change His tasks,
And dare, despatched to a river-head
For a simple draught of the element,
Neglect the thing for which He sent,

And return with another thing instead ? —
Saying, “ Because the water found
Welling up from underground,
Is mingled with the taints of earth,
While Thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,
And couldst, at a word, convulse
The world with the leap of its river-pulse, —
Therefore I turned from the oozings muddy,
And bring thee a chalice I found, instead :
See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy !
One would suppose that the marble bled.
What matters the water ? A hope I have nursed,
That the waterless cup will quench my thirst.”
— Better have knelt at the poorest stream
That trickles in pain from the straitest rift !
For the less or the more is all God’s gift,
Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite-seam.
And here, is there water or not, to drink ?
I, then, in ignorance and weakness,
Taking God’s help, have attained to think
My heart does best to receive in meekness
That mode of worship, as most to His mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind,
His All in All appears serene
With the thinnest human veil between,
Letting the mystic Lamps, the Seven,
The many motions of His spirit,
Pass, as they list, to earth from Heaven.
For the preacher’s merit or demerit,

It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel, holding treasure,
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer ;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure ?
Heaven soon sets right all other matters !—
Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,
This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,
This soul at struggle with insanity,
Who thence take comfort, can I doubt,
Which an empire gained, were a loss without.
May it be mine ! And let us hope
That no worse blessing befall the Pope,
Turn'd sick at last of the day's buffoonery,
Of its posturings and its petticoatings,
Beside his Bourbon bully's gloatings
In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery !
Nor may the Professor forego its peace
At Göttingen, presently, when, in the dusk
Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase
Prophesied of by that horrible husk ;
When, thicker and thicker, the darkness fills
The world through his misty spectacles,
And he gropes for something more substantial
Than a fable, myth, or personification,—
May Christ do for him, what no mere man shall,
And stand confessed as the God of salvation !
Meantime, in the still recurring fear
Lest myself, at unawares, be found,
While attacking the choice of my neighbors round,

Without my own made — I choose here !
The giving out of the hymn reclaims me ;
I have done ! — And if any blames me,
Thinking that merely to touch in brevity
The topics I dwell on, were unlawful, —
Or, worse, that I trench, with undue levity,
On the bounds of the holy and the awful, —
I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,
And refer myself to THEE, instead of him,
Who head and heart alike discernest,
Looking below light speech we utter
When the frothy spume and frequent sputter
Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest !
May the truth shine out, stand ever before us !
I put up pencil and join chorus
To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,
The last five verses of the third section
Of the seventeenth hymn in Whitfield's Collection,
To conclude with the doxology.

E A S T E R - D A Y .



I.

How very hard it is to be
A Christian ! Hard for you and me,
— Not the mere task of making real
That duty up to its ideal,
Effecting thus, complete and whole,
A purpose of the human soul —
For that is always hard to do ;
But hard, I mean, for me and you
To realize it, more or less,
With even the moderate success
Which commonly repays our strife
To carry out the aims of life.
“ This aim is greater,” you will say,
“ And so more arduous every way.”
— But the importance of their fruits
Still proves to man, in all pursuits,
Proportional encouragement.
“ Then, what if it be God’s intent
That labor to this one result
Should seem unduly difficult ? ”
Ah, that ’s a question in the dark —

And the sole thing that I remark
Upon the difficulty, this ;
We do not see it where it *is*,
At the beginning of the race :
As we proceed, it shifts its place,
And where we looked for crowns to fall,
We find the tug 's to come, — that 's all.

II.

At first you say, "The whole, or chief
Of difficulties, is Belief.
Could I believe once thoroughly,
The rest were simple. What? Am I
An idiot, do you think, — a beast?
Prove to me, only that the least
Command of God is God's indeed,
And what injunction shall I need
To pay obedience? Death so nigh,
When time must end, eternity
Begin, — and cannot I compute,
Weigh loss and gain together, suit
My actions to the balance drawn,
And give my body to be sawn
Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied
To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,
Like any martyr of the list?
How gladly! — if I made acquist,
Through the brief minute's fierce annoy,
Of God's eternity of joy."

III.

— And certainly you name the point
Whereon all turns : for could you joint
This flexile finite life once tight
Into the fixed and infinite,
You, safe inside, would spurn what 's out,
With carelessness enough, no doubt —
Would spurn mere life : but when time brings
To their next stage your reasonings,
Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink
Nor see the path so well, I think.

IV.

You say, " Faith may be, one agrees,
A touchstone for God's purposes,
Even as ourselves conceive of them.
Could He acquit us or condemn
For holding what no hand can loose,
Rejecting when we can't but choose ?
As well award the victor's wreath
To whosoever should take breath
Duly each minute while he lived —
Grant Heaven, because a man contrived
To see its sunlight every day
He walked forth on the public way.
You must mix some uncertainty
With faith, if you would have faith *be*.
Why, what but faith, do we abhor

And idolize each other for —
Faith in our evil, or our good,
Which is or is not understood
Aright by those we love or those
We hate, thence called our friends or foes?
Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,
When, turning from the ugly face,
I found belief in it too hard;
And she and I have our reward.
— Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us
Weak beings, to go using thus
A touchstone for our little ends,
Trying with faith the foes and friends;
— But God, bethink you! I would fain
Conceive of the Creator's reign
As based upon exacter laws
Than creatures build by with applause.
In all God's acts — (as Plato cries
He doth) — He *should* geometrize.
Whence, I desiderate . . .”

V.

I see!

You would grow as a natural tree,
Stand as a rock, soar up like fire.
The world's so perfect and entire,
Quite above faith, so right and fit!
Go there, walk up and down in it!
No. The creation travails, groans —

Contrive your music from its moans,
Without or let or hindrance, friend !
That 's an old story, and its end
As old — you come back (be sincere)
With every question you put here
(Here where there once was, and is still,
We think, a living oracle,
Whose answers you stand carping at)
This time flung back unanswered flat, —
Besides, perhaps, as many more
As those that drove you out before,
Now added, where was little need !
Questions impossible, indeed,
To us who sat still, all and each
Persuaded that our earth had speech
Of God's, writ down, no matter if
In cursive type or hieroglyph, —
Which one fact freed us from the yoke
Of guessing why He never spoke.
You come back in no better plight
Than when you left us, — am I right ?

VI.

So, the old process, I conclude,
Goes on, the reasoning 's pursued
Further. You own, "T is well averred,
A scientific faith 's absurd,
— Frustrates the very end 't was meant
To serve. So, I would rest content

With a mere probability,
But, probable ; the chance must lie
Clear on one side, — lie all in rough,
So long as there be just enough
To pin my faith to, though it hap
Only at points : from gap to gap
One hangs up a huge curtain so,
Grandly, nor seeks to have it go
Foldless and flat along the wall.
— What care I if some interval
Of life less plainly may depend
On God? I'd hang there to the end ;
And thus I should not find it hard
To be a Christian and debarred
From trailing on the earth, till furled
Away by death. — Renounce the world !
Were that a mighty hardship? Plan
A pleasant life, and straight some man
Beside you, with, if he thought fit,
Abundant means to compass it,
Shall turn deliberate aside
To try and live as, if you tried
You clearly might, yet most despise.
One friend of mine wears out his eyes,
Slighting the stupid joys of sense,
In patient hope that, ten years hence,
'Somewhat completer,' he may say,
'My list of *coleoptera* !'
While just the other who most laughs

At him, above all epitaphs
Aspires to have his tomb describe
Himself as Sole among the tribe
Of snuff-box-fanciers, who possessed
A Grignon with the Regent's crest.
So that, subduing, as you want,
Whatever stands predominant
Among my earthly appetites
For tastes, and smells, and sounds, and sights,
I shall be doing that alone,
To gain a palm-branch and a throne,
Which fifty people undertake
To do, and gladly, for the sake
Of giving a Semitic guess,
Or playing pawns at blindfold chess."

VII.

Good ! and the next thing is, — look round
For evidence enough. 'T is found,
No doubt : as is your sort of mind,
So is your sort of search — you 'll find
What you desire, and that's to be
A Christian. What says history ?
How comforting a point it were
To find some mummy-scrap declare
There lived a Moses ! Better still,
Prove Jonah's whale translatable
Into some quicksand of the seas,
Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,

That faith might clap her wings and crow
From such an eminence! Or, no —
The human heart's best; you prefer
Making that prove the minister
To truth; you probe its wants and needs,
And hopes and fears, then try what creeds
Meet these most aptly, — resolute
That faith plucks such substantial fruit
Wherever these two correspond,
She little needs to look beyond,
And puzzle out who Orpheus was,
Or Dionysius Zagrias.
You'll find sufficient, as I say,
To satisfy you either way;
You wanted to believe; your pains
Are crowned — you do: and what remains?
“Renounce the world!” — Ah, were it done
By merely cutting one by one
Your limbs off, with your wise head last,
How easy were it! — how soon past,
If once in the believing mood!
“Such is man's usual gratitude,
Such thanks to God do we return,
For not exacting that we spurn
A single gift of life, forego
One real gain, — only taste them so
With gravity and temperance,
That those mild virtues may enhance
Such pleasures, rather than abstract —

Last spice of which, will be the fact
Of love discerned in every gift;
While, when the scene of life shall shift,
And the gay heart be taught to ache,
As sorrows and privations take
The place of joy, — the thing that seems
Mere misery, under human schemes,
Becomes, regarded by the light
Of love, as very near, or quite
As good a gift as joy before.
So plain is it that, all the more
God's dispensation's merciful,
More pettishly we try and cull
Briers, thistles, from our private plot,
To mar God's ground where thorns are not!"

VIII.

Do you say this, or I? — Oh, you!
Then, what, my friend, — (thus I pursue
Our parley) — you indeed opine
That the Eternal and Divine
Did, eighteen centuries ago,
In very truth . . . Enough! you know
The all-stupendous tale, — that Birth,
That Life, that Death! And all, the earth
Shuddered at, — all, the heavens grew black
Rather than see; all, Nature's rack
And throe at dissolution's brink
Attested, — all took place, you think,

Only to give our joys a zest,
And prove our sorrows for the best?
We differ, then! Were I, still pale
And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,
Waiting to hear God's voice declare
What horror followed for my share,
As implicated in the deed,
Apart from other sins, — concede
That if He blacked out in a blot
My brief life's pleasantness, 't were not
So very disproportionate!
Or there might be another fate —
I certainly could understand
(If fancies were the thing in hand)
How God might save, at that Day's price,
The impure in their impurities,
Give formal license and complete
To choose the fair and pick the sweet.
But there be certain words, broad, plain,
Uttered again and yet again,
Hard to mistake, or overgloss —
Announcing this world's gain for loss,
And bidding us reject the same:
The whole world lieth (they proclaim)
In wickedness, — come out of it!
Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,
But I who thrill through every nerve
At thought of what deaf ears deserve, —
How do you counsel in the case?

IX.

“I’d take, by all means, in your place,
The safe side, since it so appears :
Deny myself, a few brief years,
The natural pleasure, leave the fruit
Or cut the plant up by the root.
Remember what a martyr said
On the rude tablet overhead !
‘I was born sickly, poor and mean,
A slave : no misery could screen
The holders of the pearl of price
From Cæsar’s envy ; therefore twice
I fought with beasts, and three times saw
My children suffer by his law ;
At last my own release was earned :
I was some time in being burned,
But at the close a Hand came through
The fire above my head, and drew
My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
Sergius, a brother, writes for me
This testimony on the wall —
For me, I have forgot it all.’
You say right ; this were not so hard !
And since one nowise is debarred
From this, why not escape some sins
By such a method ?”

X.

Then begins

To the old point, revulsion new —
(For 't is just this, I bring you to)
If after all we should mistake,
And so renounce life for the sake
Of death and nothing else? You hear
Our friends we jeered at, send the jeer
Back to ourselves with good effect —
“There *were* my beetles to collect!”
“My box — a trifle, I confess,
But here I hold it, ne'ertheless!”
Poor idiots, (let us pluck up heart
And answer) we, the better part
Have chosen, though 't were only hope, —
Nor envy moles like you that grope
Amid your veritable muck,
More than the grasshoppers would truck,
For yours, their passionate life away,
That spends itself in leaps all day
To reach the sun, you want the eyes
To see, as they the wings to rise
And match the noble hearts of them!
Thus the contemner we contemn, —
And, when doubt strikes us, thus we ward
Its stroke off, caught upon our guard,
— Not struck enough to overturn
Our faith, but shake it — make us learn

What I began with, and, I wis,
End, having proved, — how hard it is
To be a Christian !

XI.

“Proved, or not,
Howe’er you wis, small thanks, I wot,
You get of mine, for taking pains
To make it hard to me. Who gains
By that, I wonder? Here I live
In trusting ease ; and here you drive
At causing me to lose what most
Yourself would mourn for had you lost !”

XII.

But, do you see, my friend, that thus
You leave St. Paul for Æschylus ?
— Who made his Titan’s arch-device
The giving men *blind hopes* to spice
The meal of life with, else devoured
In bitter haste, while lo ! death loured
Before them at the platter’s edge !
If faith should be, as I allege,
Quite other than a condiment
To heighten flavors with, or meant
(Like that brave curry of his Grace)
To take at need the victuals’ place ?
If, having dined, you would digest
Besides, and turning to your rest
Should find instead . . .

XIII.

Now, you shall see
And judge if a mere foppery
Pricks on my speaking ! I resolve
To utter . . yes, it shall devolve
On you to hear as solemn, strange
And dread a thing as in the range
Of facts, — or fancies, if God will —
E'er happened to our kind ! I still
Stand in the cloud, and while it wraps
My face, ought not to speak, perhaps ;
Seeing that if I carry through
My purpose, if my words in you
Find a live actual listener,
My story, reason must aver
False after all — the happy chance !
While, if each human countenance
I meet in London day by day,
Be what I fear, — my warnings fray
No one, and no one they convert,
And no one helps me to assert
How hard it is to really be
A Christian, and in vacancy
I pour this story !

XIV.

I commence
By trying to inform you, whence

It comes that every Easter-night
As now, I sit up, watch, till light,
Upon those chimney-stacks and roofs,
Give, through my window-pane, gray proofs
That Easter-day is breaking slow.
On such a night, three years ago,
It chanced that I had cause to cross
The common, where the chapel was,
Our friend spoke of, the other day —
You 've not forgotten, I dare say.
I fell to musing of the time
So close, the blessed matin-prime
All hearts leap up at, in some guise —
One could not well do otherwise.
Insensibly my thoughts were bent
Toward the main point ; I overwent
Much the same ground of reasoning
As you and I just now. One thing
Remained, however — one that tasked
My soul to answer ; and I asked,
Fairly and frankly, what might be
That History, that Faith, to me
— Me there — not me in some domain
Built up and peopled by my brain,
Weighing its merits as one weighs
Mere theories for blame or praise,
— The kingcraft of the Lucumons,
Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons, —
But *my* faith *there*, or none at all.

“How were my case, now, did I fall
Dead here, this minute — should I lie
Faithful or faithless?” — Note that I
Inclined thus ever! — little prone
For instance, when I lay alone
In childhood, to go calm to sleep
And leave a closet where might keep
His watch perdue some murderer
Waiting till twelve o’clock to stir,
As good, authentic legends tell :
“He might : but how improbable !
How little likely to deserve
The pains and trial to the nerve
Of thrusting head into the dark !” —
Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark
Beside, that, should the dreadful scout
Really lie hid there, and leap out
At first turn of the rusty key,
Mine were small gain that she could see,
Killed not in bed but on the floor,
And losing one night’s sleep the more.
I tell you, I would always burst
The door ope, know my fate at first.
This time, indeed, the closet penned
No such assassin : but a friend
Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit
For counsel, Common Sense, to wit,
Who said a good deal that might pass, —
Heartening, impartial too, it was,

Judge else : “ For, soberly now, — who
Should be a Christian if not you ? ”
(Hear how he smoothed me down.) “ One takes
A whole life, sees what course it makes
Mainly, and not by fits and starts —
In spite of stoppage which imparts
Fresh value to the general speed.
A life, with none, would fly indeed :
Your progressing is slower — right !
We deal with progress and not flight.
Through baffling senses passionate,
Fancies as restless, — with a freight
Of knowledge cumbersome enough
To sink your ship when waves grow rough,
Though meant for ballast in the hold, —
I find, ’mid dangers manifold,
The good bark answers to the helm
Where faith sits, easier to o’erwhelm
Than some stout peasant’s heavenly guide,
Whose hard head could not, if it tried,
Conceive a doubt, nor understand
How senses hornier than his hand
Should ’tice the Christian off his guard.
More happy ! But shall we award
Less honor to the hull which, dogged
By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged,
Masts by the board, her bulwarks gone,
And stanchions going, yet bears on, —
Than to mere life-boats, built to save,

And triumph o'er the breaking wave?
Make perfect your good ship as these,
And what were her performances!"
I added — "Would the ship reach home!
I wish indeed 'God's kingdom come —'
The day when I shall see appear
His bidding, as my duty, clear
From doubt! And it shall dawn, that day,
Some future season; Easter may
Prove, not impossibly, the time —
Yes, that were striking — fates would chime
So aptly! Easter-morn, to bring
The Judgment! — deeper in the Spring
Than now, however, when there's snow
Capping the hills; for earth must show
All signs of meaning to pursue
Her tasks as she was wont to do
— The skylark, taken by surprise
As we ourselves, shall recognize
Sudden the end. For suddenly
It comes; the dreadfulness must be
In that; all warrants the belief —
'At night it cometh like a thief.'
I fancy why the trumpet blows;
— Plainly, to wake one. From repose
We shall start up, at last awake
From life, that insane dream we take
For waking now, because it seems.
And as, when now we wake from dreams,

We laugh, while we recall them, ‘Fool,
To let the chance slip, linger cool
When such adventure offered! Just
A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust
Aside, a wicked mage to stab —
And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab!’ —
So shall we marvel why we grudged
Our labor here, and idly judged
Of Heaven, we might have gained, but lose!
Lose? Talk of loss, and I refuse
To plead at all! You speak no worse
Nor better than my ancient nurse
When she would tell me in my youth
I well deserved that shapes uncouth
Frighted and teased me in my sleep —
Why could I not in memory keep
Her precept for the evil’s cure?
‘Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure
You’ll wake forthwith!’”

xv.

And as I said
This nonsense, throwing back my head
With light complacent laugh, I found
Suddenly all the midnight round
One fire. The dome of heaven had stood
As made up of a multitude
Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack
Of ripples infinite and black,

From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
Like horror and astonishment,
A fierce vindictive scribble of red
Quick flame across, as if one said
(The angry scribe of Judgment) "There —
Burn it!" And straight I was aware
That the whole ribwork round, minute
Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
Was tinted, each with its own spot
Of burning at the core, till clot
Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire
As fanned to measure equable, —
As when great conflagrations kill
Night overhead, and rise and sink,
Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
And wither off the blasted face
Of heaven, and I distinct might trace
The sharp black ridgy outlines left
Unburned like network — then, each cleft
The fire had been sucked back into,
Regorged, and out it surging flew
Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
Till, tolerating to be tamed
No longer, certain rays world-wide
Shot downwardly. On every side
Caught past escape, the earth was lit;
As if a dragon's nostril split
And all his famished ire o'erflowed;

Then, as he winced at his lord's goad,
Back he inhaled : whereat I found
The clouds into vast pillars bound,
Based on the corners of the earth,
Propping the skies at top : a dearth
Of fire i' the violet intervals,
Leaving exposed the utmost walls
Of time, about to tumble in
And end the world.

XVI.

I felt begin
The Judgment-Day : to retrocede
Was too late now. " In very deed,"
(I uttered to myself) " that Day !"
The intuition burned away
All darkness from my spirit too :
There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world. The choice was made ;
And naked and disguiseless stayed,
And unevadable, the fact.
My brain held ne'ertheless compact
Its senses, nor my heart declined
Its office ; rather, both combined
To help me in this juncture. I
Lost not a second, — agony
Gave boldness : since my life had end
And my choice with it — best defend,
Applaud both ! I resolved to say,

“So was I framed by Thee, such way
I put to use Thy senses here !
It was so beautiful, so near,
Thy world, — what could I then but choose
My part there ? Nor did I refuse
To look above the transient boon
Of time ; but it was hard so soon
As in a short life, to give up
Such beauty : I could put the cup
Undrained of half its fulness, by ;
But, to renounce it utterly,
— That was too hard ! Nor did the cry
Which bade renounce it, touch my brain
Authentically deep and plain
Enough to make my lips let go.
But Thou, who knowest all, dost know
Whether I was not, life’s brief while,
Endeavoring to reconcile
Those lips (too tardily, alas !)
To letting the dear remnant pass,
One day, — some drops of earthly good
Untasted ! Is it for this mood,
That Thou, whose earth delights so well,
Hast made its complement a hell ?”

XVII.

A final belch of fire like blood,
Overbroke all heaven in one flood
Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky

Fire, and both, one brief ecstasy,
Then ashes. But I heard no noise
(Whatever was) because a Voice
Beside me spoke thus, "Life is done,
Time ends, Eternity's begun,
And thou art judged for evermore."

XVIII.

I looked up ; all seemed as before ;
Of that cloud-Tophet overhead,
No trace was left : I saw instead
The common round me, and the sky
Above, stretched drear and emptily
Of life. 'T was the last watch of night
Except what brings the morning quite ;
When the armed angel, conscience-clear,
His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear
And gazes on the earth he guards,
Safe one night more through all its wards,
Till God relieve him at his post.
"A dream — a waking dream at most !"
(I spoke out quick, that I might shake
The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)
"The world gone, yet the world is here ?
Are not all things as they appear ?
Is Judgment past for me alone ?
— And where had place the great white throne ?
The rising of the quick and dead ?
Where stood they, small and great ? Who read

The sentence from the opened book ? ”
So, by degrees, the blood forsook
My heart, and let it beat afresh ;
I knew I should break through the mesh
Of horror, and breathe presently :
When, lo, again, the Voice by me !

XIX.

I saw . . . Oh, brother, 'mid far sands
The palm-tree-cinctured city stands,
Bright-white beneath, as heaven, bright-blue,
Leans o'er it, while the years pursue
Their course, unable to abate
Its paradisal laugh at fate !
One morn, — the Arab staggers blind
O'er a new tract of death, calcined
To ashes, silence, nothingness, —
And strives, with dizzy wits, to guess
Whence fell the blow. What if, 'twixt skies
And prostrate earth, he should surprise
The imaged vapor, head to foot,
Surveying, motionless and mute,
Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt,
It vanish up again ? — So hapt
My chance. HE stood there. Like the smoke
Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke, —
I saw Him. One magnificent pall
Mantled in massive fold and fall
His dread, and coiled in snaky swathes

About His feet: night's black, that bathes
All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
Against the soul of blackness there.
A gesture told the mood within —
That wrapped right hand which based the chin,
That intense meditation fixed
On His procedure, — pity mixed
With the fulfilment of decree.
Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,
Who fell before His feet, a mass,
No man now.

XX.

“ All is come to pass.
Such shows are over for each soul
They had respect to. In the roll
Of Judgment which convinced mankind
Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,
Terror must burn the truth into :
Their fate for them ! — thou hadst to do
With absolute omnipotence,
Able its judgments to dispense
To the whole race, as every one
Were its sole object. Judgment done,
God is, thou art, — the rest is hurled
To nothingness for thee. This world,
This finite life, thou hast preferred,
In disbelief of God's own word,
To Heaven and to Infinity.

Here the probation was for thee,
To show thy soul the earthly mixed
With heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
The earthly joys lay palpable, —
A taint, in each, distinct as well;
The heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
Above them, but as truly were
Taintless, so, in their nature, best.
Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest
'T was fitter spirit should subserve
The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
Beneath the spirit's play. Advance
No claim to their inheritance
Who chose the spirit's fugitive
Brief gleams, and yearned, 'This were to live
Indeed, if rays, completely pure
From flesh that dulls them, could endure, —
Not shoot in meteor-light athwart
Our earth, to show how cold and swart
It lies beneath their fire, but stand
As stars do, destined to expand,
Prove veritable worlds, our home!'
Thou saidst, — 'Let spirit star the dome
Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,
No nook of earth, — I shall not seek
Its service further!' Thou art shut
Out of the heaven of spirit; glut
Thy sense upon the world: 't is thine
Forever — take it!"

XXI.

“How? Is mine,
The world?” (I cried, while my soul broke
Out in a transport,) “Hast thou spoke
Plainly in that? Earth’s exquisite
Treasures of wonder and delight,
For me!”

XXII.

The austere Voice returned, —
“So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned
What God accounteth happiness,
Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
What hell may be His punishment
For those who doubt if God invent
Better than they. Let such men rest
Content with what they judged the best.
Let the unjust usurp at will:
The filthy shall be filthy still:
Miser, there waits the gold for thee!
Hater, indulge thine enmity!
And thou, whose heaven self-ordained
Was, to enjoy earth unrestrained,
Do it! Take all the ancient show!
The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,
And men apparently pursue
Their works, as they were wont to do,
While living in probation yet.

I promise not thou shalt forget
The Past, now gone to its account ;
But leave thee with the old amount
Of faculties, nor less nor more,
Unvisited, as heretofore,
By God's free spirit, that makes an end.
So, once more, take thy world ! expend
Eternity upon its shows, —
Flung thee as freely as one rose
Out of a summer's opulence,
Over the Eden-barrier whence
Thou art excluded. Knock in vain !”

XXIII.

I sat up. All was still again.
I breathed free : to my heart, back fled
The warmth. “ But, all the world ! ” (I said)
I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,
And recollected I might learn
From books, how many myriad sorts
Of fern exist, to trust reports,
Each as distinct and beautiful
As this, the very first I cull.
Think, from the first leaf to the last !
Conceive, then, earth's resources ! Vast
Exhaustless beauty, endless change
Of wonder ! and this foot shall range
Alps, Andes, — and this eye devour
The bee-bird and the aloe-flower ?

Z

XXIV.

Then the Voice, "Welcome so to rate
The arras-folds that variegate
The earth, 'God's antechamber, well!
The wise, who waited there, could tell
By these, what royalties in store
Lay one step past the entrance-door.
For whom, was reckoned, not too much,
This life's munificence? For such
As thou, — a race, whereof scarce one
Was able, in a million,
To feel that any marvel lay.
In objects round his feet all day;
Scarce one, in many millions more,
Willing, if able, to explore
The secreter, minuter charm!
— Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm
Of power to cope with God's intent, —
Or scared if the south firmament
With north-fire did its wings reflodge!
All partial beauty was a pledge
Of beauty in its plenitude:
But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
Retain it! plenitude be theirs
Who looked above!"

XXV.

Though sharp despairs
Shot through me, I held up, bore on.

“What matter though my trust were gone
From natural things? Henceforth my part
Be less with Nature than with Art!
For Art supplants, gives mainly worth
To Nature; 't is Man stamps the earth —
And I will seek his impress, seek
The statuary of the Greek,
Italy's painting — there my choice
Shall fix !”

XXVI.

“Obtain it !” said the Voice.
“— The one form with its single act,
Which sculptors labored to abstract,
The one face, painters tried to draw,
With its one look, from throngs they saw.
And that perfection in their soul,
These only hinted at? The whole,
They were but parts of? What each laid
His claim to glory on? — afraid
His fellow-men should give him rank
By the poor tentatives he shrank
Smitten at heart from, all the more,
That gazers pressed in to adore !
' Shall I be judged by only these?'
If such his soul's capacities,
Even while he trod the earth, — think, now
What pomp in Buonarroti's brow,
With its new palace-brain where dwells

Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
That crumbled with the transient clay !
What visions will his right hand's sway
Still turn to form, as still they burst
Upon him ? How will he quench thirst,
Titanically infantine,
Laid at the breast of the Divine ?
Does it confound thee, — this first page
Emblazoning man's heritage ? —
Can this alone absorb thy sight,
As pages were not infinite, —
Like the omnipotence which tasks
Itself, to furnish all that asks
The soul it means to satiate ?
What was the world, the starry state
Of the broad skies, — what, all displays
Of power and beauty intermixed,
Which now thy soul is chained betwixt, —
What else than needful furniture
For life's first stage ? God's work, be sure,
No more spreads wasted, than falls scant :
He filled, did not exceed, Man's want
Of beauty in this life. But through
Life pierce, — and what has earth to do,
Its utmost beauty's appanage,
With the requirement of next stage ?
Did God pronounce earth ' very good ' ?
Needs must it be, while understood
For man's preparatory state ;

Nothing to heighten nor abate :
Transfer the same completeness here,
To serve a new state's use, — and dear
Deficiency gapes every side !
The good, tried once, were bad, retried.
See the enwrapping rocky niche,
Sufficient for the sleep, in which
The lizard breathes for ages safe :
Split the mould — and as this would chafe
The creature's new world-widened sense,
One minute after day dispense
The thousand sounds and sights that broke
In, on him, at the chisel's stroke, —
So, in God's eye, the earth's first stuff
Was, neither more nor less, enough
To house man's soul, man's need fulfil.
Man reckoned it immeasurable ?
So thinks the lizard of his vault !
Could God be taken in default,
Short of contrivances, by you, —
Or reached, ere ready to pursue
His progress through eternity ?
That chambered rock, the lizard's world,
Your easy mallet's blow has hurled
To nothingness forever ; so,
Has God abolished at a blow
This world, wherein his saints were pent, —
Who, though found grateful and content,
With the provision there, as thou,

Yet knew He would not disallow
Their spirit's hunger, felt as well, —
Unsated, — not unsatable,
As Paradise gives proof. Deride
Their choice now, thou who sit'st outside ! ”

XXVII.

I cried in anguish, “ Mind, the mind,
So miserably cast behind,
To gain what had been wisely lost !
O, let me strive to make the most
Of the poor stinted soul, I nipped
Of budding wings, else now equipt
For voyage from summer isle to isle !
And though she needs must reconcile
Ambition to the life on ground,
Still, I can profit by late found
But precious knowledge. Mind is best —
I will seize mind, forego the rest,
And try how far my tethered strength
May crawl in this poor breadth and length.
Let me, since I can fly no more,
At least spin dervish-like about
(Till giddy rapture almost doubt
I fly) through circling sciences,
Philosophies and histories !
Should the whirl slacken there, then verse,
Fining to music, shall asperse
Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain

Intoxicate, half-break my chain !
 Not joyless, though more favored feet
 Stand calm, where I want wings to beat
 The floor. At least earth's bond is broke !”

XXVIII.

Then, (sickening even while I spoke)
 “ Let me alone ! No answer, pray,
 To this ! I know what Thou wilt say !
 All still is earth's, — to Know, as much
 As Feel its truths, which if we touch
 With sense, or apprehend in soul,
 What matter ? I have reached the goal —
 ‘ Where to does Knowledge serve ! ’ will burn
 My eyes, too sure, at every turn !
 I cannot look back now, nor stake
 Bliss on the race, for running's sake.
 The goal 's a ruin like the rest ! ” —
 — “ And so much worse thy latter quest,
 (Added the Voice) “ that even on earth —
 Whenever, in man's soul, had birth
 Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
 That pull the more into the less,
 Making the finite comprehend
 Infinity, — the bard would spend
 Such praise alone, upon his craft,
 As, when wind-lyres obey the waft,
 Goes to the craftsman who arranged
 The seven strings, changed them and rechanged —

Knowing it was the South that harped.
He felt his song, in singing, warped ;
Distinguished his and God's part : whence
A world of spirit as of sense
Was plain to him, yet not too plain,
Which he could traverse, not remain
A guest in : — else were permanent
Heaven on earth, which its gleams were meant
To sting with hunger for full light, —
Made visible in verse, despite
The veiling weakness, — truth by means
Of fable, showing while it screens, —
Since highest truth, man e'er supplied,
Was ever fable on outside.
Such gleams made bright the earth an age ;
Now, the whole sun 's his heritage !
Take up thy world, it is allowed,
Thou who hast entered in the cloud ! ”

XXIX.

Then I — “ Behold, my spirit bleeds,
Catches no more at broken reeds, —
But lilies flower those reeds above :
I let the world go, and take love !
Love survives in me, albeit those
I love be henceforth masks and shows,
Not loving men and women : still
I mind how love repaired all ill,
Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends

With parents, brothers, children, friends !
Some semblance of a woman yet
With eyes to help me to forget,
Shall live with me ; and I will match
Departed love with love, attach
Its fragments to my whole, nor scorn
The poorest of the grains of corn
I save from shipwreck on this isle,
Trusting its barrenness may smile
With happy foodful green one day,
More precious for the pains. I pray
For love, then, only !”

XXX.

At the word,
The Form, I looked to have been stirred
With pity and approval, rose
O'er me, as when the headsman throws
Axe over shoulder to make end —
I fell prone, letting Him expend
His wrath, while, thus, the inflicting Voice
Smote me. “Is this thy final choice ?
Love is the best ? ”T is somewhat late !
And all thou dost enumerate
Of power and beauty in the world,
The mightiness of love was curled
Inextricably round about.
Love lay within it and without,
To clasp thee, — but in vain ! Thy soul

Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
Still set deliberate aside
His love! — Now take love! Well betide
Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take
The show of love for the name's sake,
Remembering every moment Who
Beside creating thee unto
These ends, and these for thee, was said
To undergo death in thy stead
In flesh like thine : so ran the tale.
What doubt in thee could countervail
Belief in it? Upon the ground
'That in the story had been found
Too much love! How could God love *so?*'
He who in all His works below
Adapted to the needs of man,
Made love the basis of the plan, —
Did love, as was demonstrated :
While man, who was so fit instead
To hate, as every day gave proof, —
Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,
Both could and did invent that scheme
Of perfect love — 't would well beseem
Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,
Not tally with God's usual ways!"

XXXI.

And I cowered deprecatingly —
"Thou Love of God! Or let me die,

Or grant what shall seem Heaven almost !
Let me not know that all is lost,
Though lost it be — leave me not tied
To this despair, this corpse-like bride !
Let that old life seem mine — no more —
With limitation as before,
With darkness, hunger, toil, distress :
Be all the earth a wilderness !
Only let me go on, go on,
Still hoping ever and anon
To reach one eve the Better Land ! ”

XXXII.

Then did the Form expand, expand —
I knew Him through the dread disguise,
As the whole God within his eyes
Embraced me.

XXXIII.

When I lived again,
The day was breaking, — the gray plain
I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
Was this a vision ? False or true ?
Since then, three varied years are spent,
And commonly my mind is bent
To think it was a dream — be sure
A mere dream and distemperature —
The last day's watching : then the night, —
The shock of that strange Northern Light

Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream. . And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare ; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
Thank God, she still each method tries
To catch me, who may yet escape,
She knows, the fiend in angel's shape !
Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said !
Still every now and then my head
Raised glad, sinks mournful — all grows drear
Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
And think, " How dreadful to be grudged
No ease henceforth, as one that's judged,
Condemned to earth forever, shut
From Heaven ! "

But Easter-Day breaks ! But
Christ rises ! Mercy every way
Is infinite, — and who can say ?



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